

**Advaita Vedānta**

**अद्वैत वेदान्त**

*Welcome to the*  
***Advaita Vedānta Home Page***



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**Before you start, please take a look at the [transliteration key](#). Do not be put off by capital letters in the middle of words. They are there for a reason.**

This site is an attempt at providing an easy and structured online introduction to the philosophy of advaita vedAnta, as taught by SankarAcArya and his followers. It is not meant for religious propaganda. This website represents a serious attempt at exploring philosophical issues in advaita vedAnta, as handled by the leading philosophers themselves, and in the context of their times. At the end, I think it should be obvious that the core of the teaching has a timeless quality to it, making it relevant to all humankind even today.

SankarAcArya is the most important teacher of the advaita school of vedAnta, and his commentaries to the [upanishads](#), the bhagavad-gItA and the brahmasUtras define the parameters of advaita thought. However, it must be remembered that all vedAnta philosophy really goes back to the upanishads, and SankarAcArya is regarded as a pre-eminent teacher who continued the upanishadic tradition. The name SankarAcArya has become a title for the heads of the numerous advaita institutions in India today, because of the great respect and fame associated with it.

The philosophy of advaita, literally non-dualism, is the premier and oldest extant among the [vedAnta](#) schools of [Indian philosophy](#). The [upanishadic](#) quest is to understand brahman, the source of everything, the Atman, the Self, and the relationship between brahman and Atman. The upanishads explore these issues from different angles. The advaita school teaches a complete essential identity between brahman and Atman. In [other vedAntic traditions](#), the essential relationship between Atman and brahman is understood in different ways.

This website has been organized into four sections, as given in the index on the left. The **Introduction** section has three pages - one explains the transliteration scheme employed at this site and another has links to sam.skRta Slokas, many of them attributed to Sankara. The [advaita vedAnta FAQ page](#) describes various aspects of advaita in brief, and has links to pages at this site and to related sites.

The main material on advaita vedAnta has been organized into three sections, named **History**, **Philosophers** and **Philosophy**. The "History" section deals with SankarAcArya, the issues involved in reckoning his date, the living advaita tradition and related topics. Pre-Sankaran vedAnta, gauDapAda, SankarAcArya, his disciples, maNDana miSra and post-Sankaran advaitins are discussed in appropriate pages under the "Philosophers" section. The "Philosophy" section starts with a brief introduction to various schools of Indian philosophy and a page on the source texts of vedAnta, the upanishads. Philosophical issues in advaita vedAnta are examined in various other pages in this section. More pages on different aspects of advaita vedAnta and its relation to other systems are [under construction](#).



**The Supreme Swan:** In the background is an artistic rendering of a swan, with the Sanskrit sentence *Brahmaiva satyam* - Brahman is the only Truth. The swan motif is seen in the seals of many advaita organizations. The figure seen here has been adapted from the official seal of the [Sringeri maTha](#), an ancient and one of the most important centers of advaita vedAnta in India. The swan is a very popular motif in traditional Hindu symbolism. It can be found in oil-lamps used in temples and at shrines in people's homes.

The swan has a special association with advaita vedAnta. The swan is called *hamsa* in the sam.skRta language. The greatest masters in the advaita tradition are called *paramahansas* - the great swans. The word *hamsa* is a variation of *so'ham*: I am He, which constitutes the highest realization. There are other equivalences between the swan and the advaitin, that make the swan a particularly apt symbol for advaita vedAnta. The swan stays in water, but its feathers remain dry. Similarly, the advaitin lives in the world, yet strives to remain unaffected by life's ups and downs. In India, the swan is also mythically credited with the ability to separate milk from water. Similarly, the advaitin discriminates the eternal Atman from the non-eternal world. The Atman that is brahman is immanent in the world, just like milk is seemingly inseparably mixed with water, but It can never be truly realized without the *nitya-anitya-vastu viveka* - right discrimination between the eternal and ephemeral - that is essential for the advaitin. The swan is thus a symbol for the *jIvanmukta*, who is liberated while still alive in this world, by virtue of having realized Brahman.

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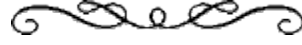
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# **Introduction**

## TRANSLITERATION KEY



It is impossible not to use Sanskrit (sam.skRta) words when talking of advaita vedAnta. I have kept philosophical terms, which often have meanings specific to the school of advaita, in the original sam.skRta, instead of translating them into English.

Here is the key to the transliteration rules that I follow when I use a sam.skRta word in the middle of English text. This transliteration is by no means perfect, but it is meant for easy online representation in the international Roman alphabet. The intention is to convey a flavor of the original pronunciation of the sam.skRta words. I have avoided the use of additional diacritical marks as much as possible, by making use of upper-case letters. Basic knowledge of the devanAgari script is assumed.

Vowels		Consonants				
अ	a	क्	ख्	ग्	घ्	ङ्
आ ( ा )	A	k	kh	g	gh	n
इ ( ि )	i	च्	छ्	ज्	झ्	ञ्
ई ( ि )	I	c	ch	j	jh	n
उ ( उ )	u	ट्	ठ्	ड्	ढ्	ण्
ऊ ( ू )	U	T	Th	D	Dh	N
ऋ ( ृ )	R	त्	थ्	द्	ध्	न्
ॠ ( ॠ )	RR	t	th	d	dh	n
ऌ ( ॡ )	lr.	प्	फ्	ब्	भ्	म्
ए ( े )	e	p	ph	b	bh	m
ऐ ( ै )	ai					
ओ ( ो )	o	य्	र	ल्	व्	
औ ( ौ )	au	y	r	l	v/w	
अं ( ं )	m.	श्	ष	स्	ह	ज्ञ
अः ( ः )	:	S	sh	s	h	jn

### NOTES:

1. The pronunciation of vowels is closer to German usage than to English. Note the dots "." used in the vowel list (e.g. m. and lr.). "R" is used in words such as Rshi, bRhada etc. RR and lr. are included for the sake of completeness.
2. The avagraha sign (indicating an elided "a") is depicted as ' - an apostrophe. This sign is not included in the above image.
3. ङ्, ञ्, ण् are all transliterated as "n". The pronunciation is clear from the context, as they occur mostly in conjunct formations.
4. visarga ( ः ) is used only in quotations.



5. Aspirated and non-aspirated consonants are indicated by separate signs in Indian scripts. Thus, "p" is always non-aspirated, while "ph" is always an aspirated sound.
6. Upper-case letters are used in both the vowel and consonant lists for transliteration. Generally, an upper-case vowel , e.g. "A", is a longer version of the corresponding lower-case vowel, here "a". Upper-case consonants are used only in one series (T ... N). Upper-case letters are avoided in all the other series, in order to be unambiguous and to maintain uniformity.
7. Consequently, sentences that incorporate sam.skr.ta words appear to deviate from normal English punctuation. The only exceptions to this occur in the titles, which are all in capitals. Here, a larger font size is used to denote a sound that would normally require an upper-case letter.
8. The transliteration scheme is used only for words that are specifically related to advaita vedAnta. Thus, names of Indian states or cities are spelt according to usual convention.
9. The spelling Sankara is used, instead of Sam.kara.

**Acknowledgement:** Prof. Ashok Aklujkar of the University of British Columbia provided the devanAgari font used in the above scheme, and in the gif files at the Slokas page.



॥ श्रीः ॥

शुक्लाम्बरधरं विष्णुं शशिवर्णं चतुर्भुजं ।  
प्रसन्नवदनं ध्यायेत्सर्वविघ्नोपशान्तये ॥

अज्ञानन पद्मार्कं गजाननमहर्निशं ।  
अनेकदं तं भक्तानामेकदन्तमुपास्महे ॥

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुर्गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।  
गुरुस्साक्षात्परब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

गुरवे सर्वं लोकानां भिषजे भवरोगिणां ।  
निधये सर्वविद्यानां दक्षिणामूर्तये नमः ॥

अज्ञानन्तर्गहन पतितानात्मविद्योपदेशैः  
त्रातुं लोकान् भवदवशिखातापपापच्यमानान्  
मुक्त्वा मौनं वटविटपिनो मूलतो निःसरन्ती  
शंभोर्मूर्तिश्चरति भुवने शंकराचार्यरूपा ॥



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The above verses salute the Gods and the Guru. The last verse is taken from the [mAdhavIya Sankaravijayam](#), and praises [SankarAcArya](#), as an incarnation of [Siva-dakshiNAMUrTi](#), who abandoned his silent meditation at the foot of the banyan tree, and incarnated on earth in order to teach advaita.

● A number of hymns and texts attributed to SrI SankarAcArya are obtainable at the [Sanskrit ftp site](#). Files are available in postscript and gif formats, and also in ITRANS transliteration.

● [SankarAcArya ashTottaraSata nAmastotram](#) - The 108 names used for worship, presented in a hymn format.

● [toTakAshTakam](#) - composed by SankarAcArya's direct disciple, toTakAcArya. Also available from the [Sanskrit ftp site](#) in [itrans](#), [postscript](#) and [gif](#) formats.

● [SrI lakshmiInRsimha karAvalamba stotram](#) of SrI SankarAcArya. Also see a [translation](#), by [Anand Hudli](#), on the [advaita mailing list archives](#).

● The [SrI venkaTeSa karAvalamba stotram](#), a composition of SrI "ugra" narasimha bhAratI (1817 - 1878), the 32nd jagadguru SankarAcArya of [Sringeri](#), is based on the same pattern.

● [SAradA bhujangam](#) - in praise of SAradA, or Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning, who symbolizes *brahmavidyA*. SAradA is worshipped specially at [Sringeri](#) Sarada Peetha and the Dvaraka Sarada Peetha. Many other monasteries of the advaita tradition are also called SAradA maThas.

● [hastAmalakiya Slokas](#). Also available from the [Sanskrit ftp site](#) in [itrans](#), [postscript](#) and [gif](#) formats.

● saundaryalaharI - attributed to SankarAcArya. A new interactive multimedia CD-ROM is now available from [Chidagni Creations](#). Also available as a [zip](#) file from the [Indology](#) site, and from the [Sanskrit ftp site](#) in [itrans](#), [postscript](#) and [gif](#) formats.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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## 1. What is advaita vedAnta?

Literally, "non-dualism," advaita is the name of the oldest extant school of vedAnta. advaita bases itself upon the [upanishads](#), the brahma-sUtras and the bhagavad-gItA. advaita asserts that the real, essential identity of the **jIva**, the individual self, is nothing other than **brahman** Itself. The teaching follows from upanishadic statements (**mahAvAkyas**) like *tat tvam asi* and *aham brahmAsmi*. It is in this cardinal doctrine that advaita differs from all other schools of vedAnta. The main tenets of advaita are detailed in commentaries written by SankarAcArya, the famous philosopher who lived in the 7th - 8th centuries A.D. Read <http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp> for a website dedicated to advaita vedAnta.

## 2. Who is the founder of advaita?

There is no single founder of advaita. Since the philosophy of advaita is rooted in the upanishads, which are part of the eternal vedas, the advaita tradition does not trace itself to a historical personality. However, [SankarAcArya](#) is venerated as the most important teacher of advaita vedAnta, as he wrote [commentaries](#) to the basic scriptural texts, and placed the [living advaita tradition](#) on a firm footing. Before SankarAcArya's time, the tradition was passed down mainly through oral instruction. Even today, the traditional way to learn advaita is to sit at the feet of an accomplished guru. Mere reading of the texts is insufficient. More details about the guru paramparA of advaita are at:

<http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/advaita-parampara.html>.

There is a description of pre-Sankaran vedAnta at:

<http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/pre-sankara.html>.

### 3. What are the basic tenets of advaita?

The essential identity of the **Atman** and **brahman** is the most important tenet of advaita. brahman is the substratum on which all phenomena are experienced, and also the **antaryAmin**, the One Lord who dwells in all beings. The innermost Atman, the real Self, is the same as this antaryAmin, and identical to brahman. Liberation (**moksha**) consists in realizing this identity, not just as a matter of literal or intellectual understanding, but as something that is to be grasped by the individual in his/her own personal experience. Yogic practices help in the road towards such realization, because they help the seeker in practising control of the senses, and in directing the *antahkaraNa* (the 'internal organ' - consisting of the mind, intellect, awareness and I-ness) inwards. The practice of *ashTanga-yoga* is recommended to seekers by teachers of advaita. The seeker has to be equipped with requisite qualifications - qualities such as patience, forbearance, ability to focus one's concentration in an intense manner, an ability to discriminate between the Real and the non-Real, dispassion, and a desire for liberation. However, it is important to remember that moksha is not a result of mere ritualistic practice. Being identical to brahman, moksha always exists. Ritualistic practices help only to the extent of achieving *citta-Suddhi*, and in developing the above-mentioned qualities.

advaita is a non-dual teaching. When asked why duality is perceived in this world, advaita has a multi-pronged answer to the question. The world of multiplicity can be explained as due to **mAyA**, the power of creation wielded by the Creator, who is therefore also called the **mAyin**. From the point of view of the individual, the perception of duality/multiplicity is attributed to **avidyA** (ignorance) due to which the unity of brahman is not known, and multiplicity is seen instead. This is akin to the false perception of a snake in a rope. When the rope is known, the snake vanishes. Similarly, on brahman-realization, the world of multiplicity vanishes. This does not mean that the individual's ignorance **creates** the external world. However, the **perception** of multiplicity in the world, instead of the One brahman, is due to avidyA, i.e. ignorance. When avidyA is removed, the individual knows his own Self (Atman) to be brahman, so that there is no more world and paradoxically, no more individual. Here, the Self alone IS. Removal of avidyA is synonymous with brahman-realization, i.e. moksha.

Read <http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/ad-phil.html> for a more detailed description.

### 4. What is the relationship between advaita and buddhism? Is advaita a mere

## copy of buddhism?

No, advaita is not a mere copy of buddhism. For a few centuries now, advaita has been criticized as being "*pracanna bauddham*" - buddhism in disguise. This criticism stems mainly from some of the vaishNava schools of vedAnta, but it is misplaced. Firstly, there is no one "buddhism" and for the criticism to be valid, it must be specified which school of buddhism is being referred to. SankarAcArya expends a lot of effort criticizing many of the philosophical positions taken by various schools of buddhism in his commentaries. Among modern academic scholars, advaita vedAnta is most often compared with the madhyamaka and yogAcAra schools of buddhism. This has been inspired mainly by the fact that the **mANDUkya kArikAs**, written by **gauDapAda**, Sankara's *paramaguru*, exhibit a great familiarity with this school of buddhism.

However, if it is held that advaita vedAnta is essentially the same as madhyamaka buddhism, it must be pointed out that such a view stems from a misunderstanding of the important tenets of both advaita vedAnta and madhyamaka buddhism. There are many key details in which advaita differs from the madhyamaka school of buddhism. As for yogAcAra, the points of similarity arise from the fact that both advaita vedAnta and yogAcAra buddhism have a place for yogic practice, as do other schools of Indian philosophy. For further details, consult <http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/gaudapada.html>.

## 5. Why is advaita sometimes referred to as mAyAvAda?

The word **mAyAvAda** serves many purposes. Since advaita upholds the identity of the individual Atman with brahman, a doubt naturally arises about the origin of the variegated universe. The appearance of difference in the universe is attributed to mAyA. In popular parlance, mAyA means illusion, and a magician or a juggler is called a mAyAvI. Within advaita, mAyA has a technical significance as the creative power (*Sakti*) of brahman, which also serves to occlude, due to which the universe is perceived to be full of difference, and the unity of brahman is not known. See fuller details in response to Q. 3 above. Some vaishNava schools use the word mAyAvAda in a derogatory sense. However, this criticism interprets mAyA solely as illusion and criticizes advaita for dismissing the world as an illusion that is nothing more than a dream. Such a criticism neglects the philosophical subtlety of the concept of mAyA in advaita.

## 6. Isn't advaita falsified by everyday experience?

No. In fact, advaita acknowledges that everyday experience leads one to infer plurality, but it maintains emphatically that the transcendental experience of **brahmAnubhava** sublates the ordinary everyday experience that is based on perception through one's senses. The tradition holds that it is not correct to make one's conclusions on issues of metaphysics based only on normal everyday

experience. All schools of vedAnta rely on scripture, i.e. the Vedas, as a valid source of knowledge. As advaita vedAnta is learnt only from the upanishads, it is not falsified by everyday experience. On the other hand, the knowledge of brahman's identity sublates normal perception. It is also pointed out there would be no need for scripture if one's conclusions were based only on everyday experience. Read more at <http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/creation.html>. An account of the post-Sankaran development in thinking about the One brahman vis-a-vis the manifold universe can be found at <http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/one-many.html>.

## 7. What is the concept of scripture, according to advaita?

advaita's concept of scripture is very similar to that of the [pUrva mImAm.sA](#) school, but with two important exceptions. Thus,

1. The vedas, arranged into the Rk, yajus, sAma and atharva vedas are valid scripture. The vedas are considered *apaurusheya* (unauthored), and eternally valid texts. They constitute *Sruti*, i.e. the "heard" revelation. A number of other texts, admittedly of human authorship, are also given scriptural status, but they are subordinate to the vedas in their authority, and are valid where they do not conflict with vedic precepts. These other texts are called *smRti*, i.e. remembered tradition.
2. Each veda has a karmakANDa, consisting of mantras and ritual injunctions (*vidhis*) and a jnAnakANDa, consisting of the upanishads and brAhmaNas.
3. The first exception that advaita takes to pUrva mImAm.sA is in the role of the jnAnakANDa. The upanishads are not merely arthavAda, as maintained by the pUrva mImAm.sA schools. The upanishads teach the knowledge of brahman, and are not meant to eulogize the fruits of ritual action.
4. A second, more subtle philosophical difference with [pUrva mImAm.sA](#) is that advaita vedAnta accepts that brahman is the source of the veda, in the same way as brahman is the source of the entire universe. This acceptance of a "source" of the veda would not be acceptable to the true pUrva mImAm.sakas who follow the thought of kumArila bhaTTa or prabhAkara.

The **upanishads**, which constitute the jnAnakANDa of the vedas, are therefore called ***Sruti prasthAna***, and form one of the three sources of advaita vedAnta. The most important ***smRti prasthAna*** of advaita tradition is the **bhagavad-gItA**, which is perhaps the best known Indian religious text in modern times. The third text is the collection of **brahmasUtras**, by the sage bAdarAyaNa. The brahmasUtras establish the logical principles of orthodox vedAntic interpretation of Sruti, and are therefore called the ***nyAya prasthAna***. The truth of advaita vedAnta is therefore said to be established on the tripartite foundation (***prasthAna trayI***) of revealed scripture (Sruti), remembered tradition (smRti) and logic (nyAya).

## 8. How does worship by advaitins differ from worship in other schools of vedAnta?

Very markedly. The orthoprax advaita tradition is closely allied to the [smArta](#) tradition, which follows the system of *pancAyatana pUjA*, where vishNu, Siva, Sakti, gaNapati and sUrya are worshipped as forms of saguNa brahman. In some sources, the concept of the pancAyatana is replaced by the notion of *shaNmata*, which adds skanda to the above set of five deities. The worship is done both on a daily basis and on specific festival occasions. Questions of who is superior, vishNu or Siva, which are very popular among many groups of Hindus, are not relished by advaitins. In the words of [Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati](#) (1892 - 1954), the accomplished jIvanmukta, "you cannot see the feet of the Lord, why do you waste your time debating about the nature of His face?"

That said, vishNu and Siva, the Great Gods of Hinduism, are both very important within the advaita tradition. The sannyAsIs of the advaita order always sign their correspondence with the words "*iti nArAyaNasmaraNam*". In worship, advaitins do not insist on exclusive worship of one devatA alone. As brahman is essentially attribute-less (*nirguNa*), all attributes (*guNas*) equally belong to It, within empirical reality. The particular form that the devotee prefers to worship is called the *ishTa-devatA*. The *ishTa-devatAs* worshipped by advaitins include vishNu as kRshNa, the jagadguru, and as rAma, Siva as dakshiNAmUrti, the guru who teaches in silence, and as candramaulISvara, and the Mother Goddess as pArvatI, lakshmi and sarasvatI. Especially popular are the representations of vishNu as a *sAlagrAma*, Siva as a *linga*, and Sakti as the *SrI-yantra*. gaNapati is always worshipped at the beginning of any human endeavor, including the pUjA of other Gods. The daily *sandhyAvandana* ritual is addressed to sUrya. The sannyAsis of the advaita sampradAya recite both the *vishNu sahasranAmam* and the *SatarudrIya* portion of the yajurveda as part of their daily worship. In addition, "hybrid" forms of the Deities, such as hari-hara or Sankara-nArAyaNa and ardhanArISvara are also worshipped.

There is another significant distinction between worship in the advaita tradition and other kinds of Hindu worship. advaita insists that the distinction between the worshipper and God, the object of worship, is ultimately transcended, and that the act of worship itself points to this identity. This should not be confused with the doctrine of dualistic Saiva siddhAnta schools, which call for a ritual identification of the worshipper with Siva, for the duration of the worship. The identity of Atman and Brahman is a matter of absolute truth, not just a temporary ritual identification. Most vaishNava schools of vedAnta hold that the distinction between the worshipper and God, the object of worship, is eternally maintained.

## 9. What is the advaita concept of liberation?

In the advaita analysis, human life and behavior is explained on the basis of the



theory of **karma**, which sets the cycle of rebirths into motion. All actions, good or bad, create their own karmic residues called *vAsanas*, which exhibit their results over a period of time. The karma which has already started taking fruit is called *prArabdha karma*. This is the karma that is responsible for the current birth. The accumulated karma which is yet to take fruit is called *sancita karma*. As long as the cycle of rebirths continues, more karma will be done in the future, and this is called *Agamin karma*. Liberation (moksha) is the way out of this endless cycle.

In advaita, moksha is synonymous with brahman. Sruti says "*brahmavit brahmaiva bhavati*" - He who knows brahman becomes brahman Itself. In the advaita understanding of this statement, the "becoming" is only metaphorical. It is not as if something that was not brahman suddenly becomes brahman. Rather, "knowing brahman" means a removal of the ignorance about one's own essential nature as brahman. Thus, to "know brahman" is to "be brahman". The one who has realized the identity of his own Atman with the brahman is the *jIvanmukta*, one who is liberated even while embodied. Such realization should not and cannot just be a literal understanding of upanishadic mahAvAkyas. The *jIvanmukta* is one who has experienced the truth of the identity himself. Thus, moksha can only indirectly be called a result of ritual action (*karma mArga*) or of devotional service (*bhakti mArga*). These paths lead along the way, and constitute the "how" but not the "why" of liberation. In fact, moksha is not a result of anything, for it always exists. All that is required is the removal of ignorance. For this reason, the way of advaita vedAnta is also called the path of knowledge (*jnAna-mArga*).

#### 10. What is the significance of *jIvanmukti*?

advaita holds that realization of brahman is possible on this earth itself. The highly evolved seeker, who approaches vedAntic study with a pure mind, and a strong tendency of *mumukshutva*, is fit to really experience brahman. One who has actually realized brahman, is a *jIvanmukta* - he is liberated while still living. He continues to live in a material body, because of the momentum of the *prArabdha karma* that has already started taking fruit. But he accumulates no further karma, because all *Agamin karma* and *sancita karma* are "burnt" in the knowledge of brahmajnAna. The body eventually dies, and the *jIvanmukta* is said to have attained *videhamukti*. In accordance with the Sruti, "*na sa punarAvartate*," he does not enter into the cycle of rebirths any more.

#### 11. Who are the leading writers in the advaita tradition?

The earliest advaitins whose writings are available today are [gauDapAda](#) (6th or 7th cent. CE - *mANDUKya kArikas*) and [SankarAcArya](#) (8th cent. CE - *brahmasUtra bhAshyas*, *bhagavadgItA bhAshya* and various *upanishad bhAshyas*). Four disciples of SankarAcArya are known in the tradition - [sureSvara](#), [padmapAda](#), [toTaka](#) and [hastAmalaka](#). An elder contemporary of SankarAcArya was [maNDana miSra](#), who is traditionally identified with sureSvara.

In the post-Sankaran period, some of the leading authors are [vAcaspati miSra](#) (9th cent. CE), [sarvajnaAtman](#) (9th - 10th cent. CE), [prakASAtman](#) (10th cent. CE), [Srlharsha](#) (12th cent. CE), [citsukha](#) (13th cent. CE), [Anandagiri](#), [bhAratI tIrtha](#), [vidyAraNya](#) (13th - 14th cent. CE), [madhusUdana sarasvatI](#), [nRsimhASrama](#), [appayya dIkshita](#) (16th cent. CE), [sadASiva brahmendra and upanishad brahmendra](#) (17th - 18th cent. CE), are notable figures in the tradition. In the 20th century, [candraSekhara bhAratI and saccidAnandendra sarasvatI](#) have written scholarly treatises on advaita vedAnta. Other than these, there have been many other equally illustrious scholars who have not written texts, but who have taught their disciples through oral instruction. These post-Sankaran authors are discussed at <http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/advaita.html#philosophers>.

## 12. What are the advaita institutions of the present day?

All present day advaitins trace their guru-parampara through the four disciples of Sri SankarAcArya. These disciples were the first leaders of the [four AmnAya maThas](#) (monasteries) at Puri (*Govardhan Math, Puri 752 001, Orissa*) [Sringeri](#) (*Sri Sarada Peetham, Sringeri 577 139, Karnataka*), Dvaraka (*Dvaraka Peeth, Dvaraka 361 335, Gujarat*) and Badrinath (*Sri Sankaracharya Math, Joshimath, Badri 246 443, Uttar Pradesh*). All four maThas are functioning today. Other well-known maThas are based in Kaladi, Bangalore, Kudali, Ujjain, Rameswaram, Sivaganga, Kolhapur, [Kancipuram](#) (*Srimatham Samsthanam No. 1, Salai Street, Kanchipuram 631 502, Tamil Nadu*), Varanasi, Bodhgaya and other holy places in India. And there are a number of other institutions in India that are also active in disseminating advaita philosophy and religion, like the various daSanAmI akhADas all over north India, Kankhal Asrama in Hardwar and its branches, the Advaita Asrama in Pune, etc. In addition to these traditional advaita lineages, various other Indian religious traditions, especially those relating to kuNDalinI yoga, siddha yoga, various tAntric lineages and numerous Saiva and SAkta traditions trace some connection to the guru-paramparA of SankarAcArya and his successors. The [ramaNASramam](#) (*Tiruvannamalai 606 603, Tamil Nadu*) is another important center, associated with the memory of Sri ramaNa mahaRshi, a celebrated sage of the 20th century.

In recent times, a large number of institutions have been set up all over the world by teachers like Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Sivananda and others. These institutions also draw inspiration from advaita. See <http://www.advaita-vedanta.org/avhp/ad-today.html>, and the answer to question 13 below, for further details.

## 13. Online Resources:

1. **Mailing list for advaita vedAnta** - There is a mailing list, called ADVAITA-L, for discussing advaita vedAnta. You can subscribe to this list is to go to the list archives page:

<http://lists.advaita-vedanta.org/archives/advaita-l.html>

and to follow the appropriate link. Else, send an email to:

[listserv@lists.advaita-vedanta.org](mailto:listserv@lists.advaita-vedanta.org)

with a blank subject line and the following message:

SUBSCRIBE ADVAITA-L Your\_full\_name

Example:

SUBSCRIBE ADVAITA-L Devadatta

Once you subscribe, you will get a welcome message explaining how to set the other mailing options. If you have any questions about the mailing list, please send an email to [listmaster@advaita-vedanta.org](mailto:listmaster@advaita-vedanta.org), which reaches the list administrators, Sri Ravisankar Mayavaram, Sri Jaldhar Vyas and Sri Vaidya Sundaram. This forum is operated with minimal moderation, in the hope that the members will use self moderation and discuss advaita vedAnta with reverence. Archives of the mailing list are available in web browsable form and can be read from <http://lists.advaita-vedanta.org/archives/advaita-l.html>.

2. **Movie on Adi SankarAcArya** - A Sanskrit movie on the life of SankarAcArya was made in 1984, by G. V. Iyer. This was the first Sanskrit language movie ever made, and is available from the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) of India. Details about the movie are available at <http://www.nfdcindia.com/mipcom2.html> (NFDC website). Information about obtaining a copy of the movie can be found at the NFDC site, at <http://www.nfdcindia.com/international.html>. Also read a [discussion about this movie](#), at the archives of the advaita mailing list.
3. **Image of Adi SankarAcArya** - A clay image of Adi SankarAcArya can be obtained online from [JBL Statues](http://jblstatue.com/pages/sankaracharya.html) (<http://jblstatue.com/pages/sankaracharya.html>).
4. **CD-ROM on Saundaryalahari** - The Saundaryalahari is an important hymn attributed to SankarAcArya. A new interactive multimedia CD-ROM is available from [Chidagni Creations](#).
5. **Websites related to advaita vedAnta and vedAntins** -

The number of online resources relating to contemporary masters from the ancient advaita tradition and the modern neo-vedAnta schools is growing rapidly. Here is a collection of links you might be interested in visiting:

<http://www.erols.com/ramakris/sringeri/sringeri.html> - The Sringeri maTha, currently headed by Swami Bharati Tirtha, is the first advaita monastery, established by Adi Sankara. The Sringeri lineage is

directly or indirectly the source of most contemporary institutions associated with advaita vedAnta. In addition, there is now an official extension of the Sringeri Peetham in the USA, called the Sringeri Vidya Bharati Foundation (<http://www.asanet.com/sringeri>). The Peetham's bimonthly magazine, titled Tattvaloka, can also be obtained online in English and Italian versions (<http://www.vidya.org/tattvaloka>).

<http://www.kamakoti.org> - The Kancipuram maTha, under Swami Jayendra Sarasvati.

<http://www.chitrapurmath.org/about.htm> - The Chitrapur maTha of one group of sArasvata brAhmaNas, under Swami Sadyojata Sankarasrama. This maTha maintains its centuries old traditional links with the Sringeri maTha.

<http://www.koviloor-madalayam.org> - The Koviloor maTha, a dynamic vedAnta maTha of the Nagarattar community, under Srilasri Nachiappa Gnanadesikan. Since its inception, this maTha has maintained traditional links with Sringeri maTha. This maTha is also one of the few institutions that preserve an old tradition of teaching advaita vedAnta through Tamil texts (including original texts and translations from Sanskrit).

<http://www.culturalindia.com/karyalaya.htm> - Adhyatma Prakasha Karyalaya, founded by Swami Saccidanandendra Sarasvati.

<http://www.vedanta.org> - Vedanta Society of Southern California, in the lineage of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda.

Also see <http://www.ramakrishna.org> and

<http://www.vivekananda.org>.

<http://www.dlshq.org> The Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, established by Swami Sivananda, now headed by Swami Chidananda.

<http://www.sivananda.org> - Yoga Vedanta Center, established by Swami Vishnudevananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda.

<http://www.chinmaya.org> - Chinmaya Mission, established by Swami Chinmayananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda and Tapovan Maharaj.

<http://www.arshavidya.org> - Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, established by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Some very good lectures are available online, at <http://www.yogamalika.org/reading-room.htm>, maintained by Swami Paramarthananda.

<http://www.yogananda-srf.org> - Self Realization Fellowship, established by Swami Paramahansa Yogananda, maintains traditional links with the Puri and Bodhgaya maThas.

<http://www.ramana-maharshi.org> - About Sri Ramana Maharishi.

<http://www.SATRamana.org> - Master Nome, at Society for Abidance

in Truth, Santa Cruz, California.

<http://www.vidya.org> - Vidya Bharata, founded by Raphael, Asram Vidya Order, Italy.

<http://www.geocities.com/omkara> - Swami Omkarananda Ashram, Rishikesh, established by Swami Omkarananda.

<http://www.ayurvedahc.com/ashlinge.htm> - A Siddha Mahayoga lineage associated with [Sri bhAratI kRshNa tIrtha](#) of the Puri maTha.

<http://ddi.digital.net/~egodust> - Egodust's Pathways to Metaphysics page.

<http://www.geocities.com/RodeoDrive/1415/veda.html> - An introduction to Vedanta, by Giridhar Madras.

#### 6. OnlineBookstores/Publishers:

<http://www.tamilcinema.com/samata/page1.html> - Samata Books, Madras: A comprehensive collection of Sri SankarAcArya's works may be obtained from here. Alternatively, see

<http://www.nesmabooksindia.com/samata.htm>.

<http://www.mlbd.com> - Motilal Banarsidass, a premier Indian publishing house.

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucgadkw/indnet-publishers.html> - A collection of Indological publishers and bookshops, including Indian resources like [Chetana](#) (Mumbai), [DK Agencies](#) (New Delhi), [Vedamsbooks](#) (New Delhi) and [The India Club](#).

<http://www.vedanta.com> - Online catalog of the Vedanta Press, Los Angeles.

<http://www.sunypress.edu> - The State University of New York Press.

<http://www.bookshop.co.uk> - The Internet Bookshop, UK.

<http://www.amazon.com> - Amazon Books, largest online booksellers.

<http://www.demon.co.uk/keganpaul> - Kegan Paul International, London, UK.

<http://www.leggett.co.uk> - Trevor Leggett's books.

#### 7. Related sites:

<http://www.philo.demon.co.uk/Darshana.htm> - A well designed site on the six *darSanas* of Indian Philosophy.

<http://vedavid.org/port.html> - Collection of Vedic texts, a highly interesting graduate dissertation, presented online.

<ftp://jaguar.cs.utah.edu/private/sanskrit/sanskrit.html> - General things of interest for Sanskrit lovers.

If you wish to add any site to this list, please inform the author of this FAQ at [vsundaresan@hotmail.com](mailto:vsundaresan@hotmail.com).



**PS. Disclaimer:** The author of this FAQ does not claim to be a guru of advaita vedAnta. If you are seeking spiritual guidance, your goals will be better achieved by contacting one of the gurus/organizations mentioned above. However, note that listing of a particular website (religious institution or commercial site) in the above list does not imply that this author endorses or is connected in any special way to the corresponding organization. These links are included for the ease of the interested user.



# History

# THE ADVAITA PARAMPARA

[Transliteration Key](#)

नारायणं पद्मभुवं वसिष्ठं शक्तिं च तत्पुत्र पराशरं च  
व्यासं शुकं गौडपदं महान्तं गोविन्द योगीन्द्रमथास्य शिष्यं ।  
श्री शङ्कराचार्यमथास्य पद्मपादं च हस्तामलकं च शिष्यं  
तं तोटकं वार्तिककारमन्यानस्मद्गुरुन् सन्ततमानतोस्मि ॥  
सदाशिव समारम्भां शङ्कराचार्यं मध्यमां ।  
अस्मदाचार्यं पर्यन्तां वन्दे गुरुपरम्पराम् ॥

nArAyaNam. padmabhuvam. vasishTham. Saktim. ca tatputra parASaram. ca  
vyAsam. Sukam. gauDapadam. mahAntam. govindayogIndram athAsya Sishyam. |  
Sri Sam.karAcAryam athAsya padmapAdam. ca hastAmalakam. ca Sishyam.  
tam. toTakam. vArttikakAramanyAn asmad gurUn santatamAnatosmi ||  
sadASiva samArambhAm. SankarAcArya madhyamAm.  
asmadAcArya paryantAm. vande guru paramparAm. ||

These are the advaita *guru paramparA* verses, which salute the prominent gurus of advaita, starting from nArAyaNa through Sankara and his disciples, upto the AcAryas of today. It is typical of advaita that the first guru is called nArAyaNa (vishNu) in the first verse and sadASiva (Siva) in the second. The paramparA thus lists:

- nArAyaNa (vishNu)
- sadASiva (Siva)
- padmabhuva (brahma)
- vasishTha
- Sakti
- parASara
- vyAsa
- Suka
- gauDapAda
- govinda bhagavatpAda
- SankarAcArya
- padmapAda, hastAmalaka, toTaka, sureSvara (vArttikakAra),  
and others (anyA:).

In the Indian religious and philosophical traditions, all knowledge is traced back to the Gods and to the Rshis who saw the vedas. Thus, the advaita *guru-paramparA* begins with the *daiva-paramparA*, followed by the *Rshi-paramparA*, which includes the vedic seers vasishTha, Sakti, parASara, his son vyAsa, (the famous redactor of the vedas, he is also traditionally identified with bAdarAyaNa, the composer of the brahmasUtras), and vyAsa's son Suka. After Suka, we turn to the *mAnava-paramparA*, which brings us to historical times and personalities. The traditions regarding these human gurus are



recorded in the [Sankaravijaya](#) literature, and typically, they are regarded as incarnations of various deities. [gauDapAda](#) is the famous author of the mANDUkya kArikas that are attached to the mANDUkya upanishad. His disciple, govinda, is regarded as an incarnation of AdiSesha, the cosmic serpent. He was the preceptor of [Sankara](#), who is regarded as an incarnation of Siva. Sankara's four well-known disciples were named [padmapAda](#), [hastAmalaka](#), [toTaka](#) and [sureSvara](#) (vArttikakAra). Tradition has it that Sankara appointed these four disciples as heads of the four maThas that he founded. The others are the gurus who come later in the tradition.

Sankara and his disciples, padmapAda and sureSvara, are arguably the most important philosophers in the advaita vedAnta tradition. After the mANDUkya kArikAs, Sankara's commentaries to the [upanishads](#), brahmasUtras and bhagavadgItA are the oldest extant vedAnta treatises. The importance of Sankara can be seen from the fact that every vedAntin after him makes his mark either by expanding on his thought or by refuting him.

Sankara can be dated more or less reliably to the 8th century CE. Upto Suka, the first few gurus cannot be dated to historical times. The date of gauDapAda, the author of the mANDUkya kArikAs, is usually inferred from the tradition that he was Sankara's teacher's teacher, and from references to the mANDUkya kArikAs in other works. However, not much historical information is known about govinda bhagavatpAda, Sankara's teacher, except that Sankara salutes him in the invocatory verses in some of his works.



## SANKARA'S LIFE



[Transliteration Key](#)

The following is based upon accounts known through oral tradition and texts like the [mAdhavIya Sankara vijayam](#). There exists some controversy about [Sankara's date](#), but most traditions are quite unanimous about other details.

**Birth and childhood:** Sankara was born to the nambUdiri brAhmaNa couple, Sivaguru and AryAmbA, in a little village called [kAlaDi](#) in Kerala. The couple had remained childless for a long time, and prayed for children at the vaDakkunnAthAn (VRshAcala) temple in nearby Trichur. Siva is said to have appeared to the couple in a dream and promised them a choice of one son who would be short-lived but the most brilliant philosopher of his day, or many sons who would be mediocre at best. The couple opted for a brilliant, but short-lived son, and so Sankara was born.

ॐ नमो ब्रह्मादिभ्यो ब्रह्मविद्यासम्प्रदायकर्तृभ्यो  
वंशकृषिभ्यो नमो गुरुभ्यः ॥

[SankarAcArya ashThottaram](#)

Sankara lost his father when quite young, and his mother performed his upanayana ceremonies with the help of her relatives. Sankara excelled in all branches of

traditional vaidIka learning. A few miracles are reported about the young Sankara. As a brahmacArin, he went about collecting alms from families in the village. A lady who was herself extremely poor, but did not want to send away the boy empty-handed, gave him the last piece of Amla fruit she had at home. Sankara, sensing the abject poverty of the lady, composed a hymn (kanakadhArA stavam) to SrI, the goddess of wealth, right at her doorstep. As a result, a shower of golden Amlas rewarded the lady for her piety. On another occasion, Sankara is said to have re-routed the course of the pUrNA river, so that his old mother would not have to walk a long distance to the river for her daily ablutions.

**sam.nyAsa:** Sankara was filled with the spirit of renunciation early in his life. Getting married and settling to the life of a householder was never part of his goal in life, though his mother was anxious to see him as a gRhashta. Once when he was swimming in the

river, a crocodile caught hold of his leg. Sankara sensed that he was destined to die at that moment, and decided to directly enter the fourth ASrama of sam.nyAsa right then. This kind of renunciation is called Apat sam.nyAsa. The crocodile released him when he thus mentally decided to renounce the world, and Sankara decided to regularize his decision by going to an accomplished guru. To comfort his anxious mother, he promised that he would return at the moment of her death, to conduct her funeral rites, notwithstanding the fact that he would be a sannyAsI then.

Sankara then traveled far and wide in search of a worthy guru who would initiate him and regularize his vow of sam.nyAsa, till he came to the banks of the river narmadA in central India. Here was the ASrama of govinda bhagavatpAda, the disciple of gauDapAda, the famous author of the mANDUkya kArikAs. Sankara was accepted as a disciple by govinda, who initiated him into the paramahansa order of sam.nyAsa, the highest kind of renunciation. Seeing the intellectual acumen of his disciple, govinda commanded Sankara to expound the philosophy of vedAnta through commentaries on the principal upanishads, the brahmasUtras and the gItA. Sankara took leave of his guru and traveled to various holy places in India, composing his commentaries in the meantime. At this time he was barely a teenager. He attracted many disciples around him, prominent among whom was sanandana, who was later to be called padmapAda. In this period, Sankara wrote commentaries on bAdarAyaNa's brahmasUtras, the various upanishads and the bhagavad gItA. These commentaries, called bhAshyas, stand at the pinnacle of Indian philosophical writing, and have triggered a long tradition of sub-commentaries known as vArttikas, TIKAs and TippaNis. He also commented upon the *adhyAtma-paTala* of the Apastamba sUtras, and on vyAsa's bhAshya to patanjali's *yogasUtras*. In addition to these commentarial texts, Sankara wrote independent treatises called prakaraNa granthas, including the upadeSasAhasrI, Atmabodha, etc.

In addition to writing his own commentaries, Sankara sought out leaders of other schools, in order to engage them in debate. As per the accepted philosophical tradition in India, such debates helped to establish a new philosopher, and also to win disciples and converts from other schools. It was also traditional for the loser in the debate to become a disciple of the winner. Thus Sankara debated with Buddhist philosophers, with followers of sAm.khya and with pUrva mImAm.sakas, the followers of vedic ritualism, and proved more than capable in defeating all his opponents in debate. Sankara then sought out kumArila bhaTTa, the foremost proponent of the pUrva mImAm.sA in his age, but bhaTTa was on his deathbed and directed Sankara to viSvarUpa, his disciple. viSvarUpa is sometimes identified with [maNDana miSra](#).

Sankara's debate with viSvarUpa was unique. The referee at the debate was viSvarUpa's wife, bhAratI, who was herself very well-learned, and regarded as an incarnation of Goddess sarasvatI. At stake was a whole way of life. The agreement was that if viSvarUpa won, Sankara would consent to marriage and the life of a householder, whereas if Sankara won, viSvarUpa would renounce all his wealth and possessions and become a sannyAsI disciple of Sankara. The debate is said to have lasted for whole

weeks, till in the end, viSvarUpa had to concede defeat and become a sannyAsI. bhAratI was a fair judge, but before declaring Sankara as the winner, she challenged Sankara with questions about kAmaSAstra, which he knew nothing about. Sankara therefore requested some time, during which, using the subtle yogic process called *parakAya-praveSa*, he entered the body of a dying king and experienced the art of love with the queens. Returning to viSvarUpa's home, he answered all of bhAratI's questions, after which viSvarUpa was ordained as a sannyAsI by the name of sureSvara. He was to become the most celebrated disciple of Sankara, writing vArttikas to Sankara's bhAshyas on the yajurveda upanishads, in addition to his own independent texts on various subjects.

**Establishment of maThas:** Sankara continued to travel with his disciples all over the land, all the while composing philosophical treatises and engaging opponents in debate. It is said that none of his opponents could ever match his intellectual prowess and the debates always ended with Sankara's victory. No doubt this is true, given the unrivaled respect and popularity that Sankara's philosophical system enjoys to this day. In the course of his travels, Sankara stayed for a long time at the site of the old ASrama of the Rshis vibhAndaka and RshyaSRnga, in the place known as [SRngagiri](#) (Sringeri). Some texts mention that Sankara stayed at Sringeri for twelve years. A hermitage grew around him here, which soon developed into a famous maTha (monastery). [sureSvara](#), the disciple whom he had won after long debate, was installed as the head of this new ASrama. Similar maThas were established in the pilgrim centers of Puri, Dvaraka and Joshimath near Badrinath, and padmapAda, hastAmalaka and troTaka were placed in charge of them. These are known as the AmnAya maThas, and they continue to function today. Their heads have also come to be known as SankarAcAryas, in honor of their founder, and revered as *jagadgurus*, or teachers of the world. Sankara also organized the community of *ekadaNDI* monks into the sampradAya of [daSanAmI sannyAsins](#), and affiliated them with the four maThas that he established.

Meanwhile, Sankara heard that his mother was dying, and decided to visit her. Remembering his promise to her, he performed her funeral rites. His ritualistic relatives would not permit him to do the rites himself, as he was a sannyAsI, but Sankara overrode their objections, and built a pyre himself and cremated his mother in her own backyard. After this, he resumed his travels, visiting many holy places, reviving pUjAs at temples that had fallen into neglect, establishing SrI yantras at devI temples as in Kancipuram, and composing many devotional hymns.

**Ascension of the *sarvajnapITha*:** In the course of his travels, Sankara reached Kashmir. Here was a temple dedicated to SARadA (sarasvatI), the goddess of learning, which housed the *sarvajnapITha*, the Throne of Omniscience. It was a tradition for philosophers to visit the place and engage in debate. The victorious one would be allowed to ascend the *sarvajnapITha*. It is said that no philosopher from the southern region had ever ascended the pITha, till Sankara visited Kashmir and defeated all the others there. He then ascended the *sarvajnapITha* with the blessings of Goddess

SAradA. (A few centuries later, rAmAnuja, the teacher of viSishTAdvaita, would visit the same *sarvajnapITha* in search of the baudhAyana vRtti. However, a variant tradition places the *sarvajnapITha* in the south Indian city of Kancipuram.)

Sankara was reaching the age of 32 now. He had expounded the vedAnta philosophy through his writings; he had attracted many intelligent disciples to him, who could carry on the vedAntic tradition; and he had established monastic centers for them in the form of maThas. His had been a short, but eventful life. He retired to the Himalayas and disappeared inside a cave near Kedarnath. This cave is traditionally pointed out as the site of his samAdhi. Other variant traditions place Sankara's last days at Karavirpitham or at Mahur in Maharashtra, Trichur in Kerala or Kancipuram in Tamil Nadu. It is a measure of SankarAcArya's widespread fame that such conflicting traditions have arisen around his name.

True to the traditions of sam.nyAsA, Sankara was a peripatetic monk, who traveled the length and breadth of the country in his short lifetime. His fame spread so far and wide, that various legends are recounted about him from different parts of India. The true sannyAsI that he was, he lived completely untouched by the fabric of society. So much so that even the location of kAlaDi, his birth-place, remained generally unknown for a long time. The credit of identifying this village in Kerala goes to one of his 19th-century successors at Sringeri, SrI saccidAnanda SivAbhinava nRsimha bhAraTl. Similarly, the credit of renovating Sankara's samAdhi-sthala near Kedarnath, goes to SrI abhinava saccidAnanda tIrtha, his 20th-century successor at Dvaraka.

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## THE *SANKARAVIJAYA* LITERATURE



[Transliteration Key](#)

A number of works titled *Sankaravijaya*, or *Sankara digvijaya*, are extant in India. These are typically known after the names of their authors, but are mostly hagiographic accounts of Sankara's life, with myth and legend interspersed with historical fact. The primary reason for this situation is that most of these texts were written many centuries after Sankara lived, so that these authors already regarded Sankara as a legendary figure. The following is a brief survey of these texts.

*mAdhavIya Sankaravijaya* - The *mAdhavIya* is probably the oldest available, and also the most authentic and widely known among the different *Sankaravijayas* today. It is certainly the most popular such text in the advaita tradition, and is also known as the *sam.kshepa Sankarajaya*. The popularity of this work derives from the fame of its author, mAdhava, who is usually identified with vidyAraNya, the 14th century maThAdhipati at Sringeri. Old manuscripts of this work are available from diverse places in India, and printed editions based on a comparison of various manuscripts are available from as early as 1863 CE. [1] Two commentaries have been written to the *mAdhavIya*, one titled *DiNDimA*, by dhanapati sUrI (composed in 1798 CE), and another titled *advaitarAjyalakshmi* by acyutarAya (composed in 1824 CE). There are a couple of good English translations of the *mAdhavIya*, one by swAmI tapasyAnanda of the Ramakrishna Math, [2] and another by K. Padmanabhan. [3] Contemporary accounts of [Sankara's life](#) follow this text in most details, e.g. birth in Kaladi, meeting with his guru on the banks of the river Narmada, writing of commentaries, debate with [maNDana miSra](#), establishment of the SARadA temple at Sringeri, ascension of the *sarvajnapITha* in Kashmir and his last days in the Himalayas.

There has been some doubt in recent times about the date and authorship of the *mAdhavIya Sankaravijaya*, [4] including charges that it was reworked extensively in the 19th century CE. Almost all of this criticism is baseless. If the author of this work is not identical with vidyAraNya, the latest date that can be put to it is 1798 CE, the year in which the *DiNDimA* commentary was completed. Moreover, another author, sadAnanda, who wrote a *Sankaravijaya sAra* in 1783, informs us that his source is mAdhava's work. As such, the criticism that the *mAdhavIya* was written as late as the 19th century CE, or that portions of it were re-written recently, cannot be upheld. swAmI tapasyAnanda is correct in dismissing such criticism as nothing more than "bazaar gossip." [5] However, the earliest possible date of this work (14th century CE) is still several centuries later than Sankara's own date. Some modern historians who doubt that Sankara established any maThas at all, attribute the origin of the tradition of four AmnAya maThas to mAdhava. [6] However, it must be noted that the *mAdhavIya Sankaravijaya* gives only a general description of the establishment of maThas, at **Sringeri and other places**, but does not specifically mention the number four.



*AnandagirIya Sankaravijaya* - This work is not available today, although according to many secondary sources, it must have existed at one time. It is attributed to [Anandagiri](#), the 13th century author of well-known *TIkAs* to SankarAcArya's *bhAshyas*. One 19th century author, who wrote a commentary to the *mAdhavIya* refers to Anandagiri's *Sankaravijaya* as *bRhat Sankaravijaya* in one place and as *prAcIna Sankaravijaya* in another place. It seems clear that this text was considered to be old (*prAcIna*) and huge (*bRhat*). However, as it is no longer extant, the quotations attributed to this text are not very trustworthy.

In recent times, there have been various claims about a *bRhat Sankaravijaya* of an author named citsukha, although no manuscripts of this work have ever been available. No secondary sources refer to this text either, unlike the case with Anandagiri's text. citsukha is claimed to have been a childhood friend of Sankara's, and his work is therefore claimed to be an authoritative eye-witness account. However, even the source for this story about citsukha remains unknown, as none of the other *Sankaravijayas* mention such a childhood friend who witnessed all of Sankara's life. All claims about the *bRhat Sankaravijaya* of citsukha seem extremely far-fetched, and within the [living advaita tradition](#), there is great controversy over the very existence of this text. There is a more recent text, called *bRhat Sankaravijaya*, by one brahmAnanda sarasvatI, which seems to date from the 17th or 18th century.

Another *prAcIna Sankaravijaya* is also sometimes attributed to one mUkakavi. As with the *bRhat Sankaravijaya* of citsukha, nothing specific is known about this *prAcIna Sankaravijaya* either, as all attempts to trace source manuscripts have failed. Some quotations from a *prAcIna Sankaravijaya* are found in some very recent works, but the real source of these quotations remains unknown.

*anantAnandagirIya Sankaravijaya* - In my opinion, this work is very unreliable. To begin with, it is a very late text and all available versions seem extremely corrupt. The author of this text identifies himself as anantAnandagiri. Many scholars mistakenly identify this text with that of Anandagiri, the TIkAkAra, probably due to the misleading similarity of their names. Among these, H. H. Wilson thinks that the author is **an unblusing liar**, because he reports miracles and supernatural events associated with Sankara. However, he seems prepared to accept this text's description of Hindu religious cults. About forty out of the seventy-odd chapters in this work describe some 72 different religious cults and sects prevalent in India, which Wilson uses in his study. A. C. Burnell, however, thinks that the work is spurious and very modern, [7] written in the interests of southern maThas which had broken their ties with the Sringeri maTha. Be that as it may, a casual reading of this *Sankaravijaya* text is enough to convince the reader that its author cannot be identified with Anandagiri at all. anantAnandagiri appears to be a quite different author altogether. He quotes sections from the *adhikaraNa ratnamALA*, a 14th-century work of vidyAraNya and bhAratI tIrtha, but attributes these quotations to Sankara. He also makes barely veiled references to rAmAnuja, the 11th-century teacher of viSishTAdvaita, and AnandatIrtha, the 13th-

century teacher of dvaita. Both of them have been described as direct disciples of Sankara himself.

Moreover, most of the available manuscripts of this work are incomplete, and even these seem to have been heavily tampered with. Two separate accounts of Sankara's life may be found in different editions of this work. For example, the 19th century editions from Calcutta, [8] and all their source manuscripts, describe Sankara's birth at Cidambaram in Tamil Nadu, while the 1971 Madras edition [9] says that Sankara was born at Kaladi in Kerala. The earlier 19th century editions mention a maTha at Sringeri, and no maTha at Kancipuram. However, in the 1971 Madras edition, an ASrama has been mentioned **near** Sringeri, and a maTha at Kancipuram has been described in great detail. All editions mention that Sankara stayed at Sringeri for twelve years, and his last days are placed at Kancipuram, but this text is totally silent about any *sarvajnapITha*. It has been pointed out that the 1971 Madras edition is not true to the manuscripts that it lists as its sources. [10] T. M. P. Mahadevan's introduction to this edition also wrongly identifies this work with that of Anandagiri, the TikAkAra, and claims that this must be the work that is called both *brhat* and *prAcIna*. However, Mahadevan is silent about the *brhat* text said to have been written by citsukha and the *prAcIna* text attributed to mUkakavi.

***cidvilAsIya Sankaravijaya*** - This text is also known as the ***Sankaravijaya vilAsa***, and was probably written between the 15th and 17th centuries. It is in the form of a dialogue between one cidvilAsa and his disciple, named vijnAnakanda. [11] This is one of the few texts that explicitly record the tradition that four maThas were established by Sankara, at Sringeri, Dvaraka, Puri and Badrinath. cidvilAsa devotes three entire chapters to the founding of the Sringeri maTha, and one chapter to a *sarvajnapITha* at Kancipuram. However, he does **not** say anything about the establishment of a fifth maTha at Kancipuram, [12] and Sankara's last days are placed near Badrinath in the Himalayas. Except for its variant tradition about the *sarvajnapITha*, this text also agrees with the *mAdhavIya* in most other details.

***kerallIya Sankaravijaya*** - This text is also called the ***SankarAcAryacarita*** and is attributed to one govindanAtha in all manuscripts. [13] This text conflates the variant traditions about the *sarvajnapITha*, and mentions both Kashmir and Kancipuram in the same verse. It is completely silent about the establishment of any maThas, and describes Sankara's last days at the vRshAcaleSvara temple in Trichur, Kerala. In this last detail, it differs from all other available oral traditions and *Sankaravijaya* texts. It dates from the 17th century.

**Other minor texts** - The ***kUshmANDa Sankaravijaya*** of purushottama bhArati describes the establishment of a SARadA temple at a place called Pammapura, and is rather unique in describing Sankara and his four disciples as incarnations of the five Pandavas, who are in turn described as partial incarnations of Siva! A 17th century author named rAjacUDamaNi dikshita wrote a short hagiographical poem named ***SankarAbhyudaya***. Among more recent works (late 18th century and after),

sadAnanda's *Sankaravijaya sAra* and nllakaNTha's *SankaramandAra saurabha* follow the details given in the *mAdhavIya*. Both authors explicitly mention their source in their introductory chapters. nllakaNTha also wrote another poem named *SankarAbhyudaya*, which is one of the few works to give the 788 CE date for Sankara's birth. Another *SankarAbhyudaya* is attributed to one tirumala dIkshita. This and a work known as *vyAsAcallIya Sankaravijaya* are of extremely doubtful authenticity, as they reproduce a large number of verses from the *mAdhavIya Sankaravijaya*. The *bhagavatpAdAbhyudaya* of mahAkavi lakshmaNa sUrin is an early 20th century work, which recounts all the traditional details of Sankara's life.

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# DETERMINING SANKARA'S DATE - AN OVERVIEW OF ANCIENT SOURCES AND MODERN LITERATURE



[Transliteration Key](#)

**The Sources:** Placing Sankara in a period according to the modern calendar is a difficult problem. The official date accepted currently is 788-820 CE, and the Government of India celebrated the 1200th anniversary of Sankara's birth in 1988. This date is largely based upon one traditional view prevalent in India. [1] However, the date is still open to question, as pointed out by swAmI tapasyAnanda in his translation of the [mAdhavIya Sankaravijayam](#). [2] This difficulty is experienced for almost all personalities in Indian history, due to paucity of proper records and conflicting traditions current in different parts of the country. As far as the problem of dating Sankara is concerned, our sources of information are: internal evidence from Sankara's works, the astronomical details recorded in some of the Sankaravijayams, and the traditional accounts kept in the advaita maThas in India.

**Internal Evidence:** Of these three sources, a lot of scholarly work has been done in the recent past, analyzing the internal evidence from Sankara's works. The date now seems to be converging to the early 8th century CE. [3] The most important internal evidence comes from Sankara's verbatim quotation of [dharmakIrti](#), the buddhist logician. [Hsuan Tsang](#), the Chinese pilgrim, who visited India in the time of [harshavardhana](#), king of Thanesar (606 - 647 CE), gives clues to dharmakIrti's date. He also mentions [bhartRhari](#), but not of Sankara. It follows that Sankara is post-dharmakIrti, and possibly post-Hsuan-Tsang also. Critical academic scholars are converging to a date near 700 CE for Sankara's period.

**Astronomical Details:** The astronomical details in the various *Sankaravijaya* texts are not of much use. More often than not, the details in one work contradict those in another, and one cannot rely on any of them unless one is preferentially biased to accept one of the *Sankaravijayas* as more authoritative than the others. Dates ranging from the 5th cent BCE to 8th cent CE have been calculated on the basis of such astronomical details. One further complication is that some astronomical information is said to have been obtained from works which are not available anywhere in India. So it is difficult even to authenticate the astronomical details from their supposed sources. Also, not all the currently available texts titled *Sankaravijaya* are accepted as authoritative within the [living advaita tradition](#). Under the circumstances, it should be noted that the astronomical references in one text is only as good or as bad as all the other such details in other texts, and no firm conclusion can be drawn about their validity.

**Records of maThas:** Whether Sankara established any maThas at all has been questioned in the modern literature. Thus, Paul Hacker attributes the tradition of four AmnAya maThas at Sringeri, Puri, Dvaraka and Joshimath to [vidyAraNyasvAmin](#). The

native oral tradition, however, takes the history of these four maThas, each associated with one of the four geographical directions and one of the four vedas, to SankarAcArya himself. The daSanAmI sannyAsI sampradAya, with its various akhADas in northern India, accepts affiliation only with these four maThas, though such affiliation is largely nominal. There seems to be some historical evidence for the existence of the oldest daSanAmI akhADas as early as the 9th cent. CE. [4] However, as swAmI tapasyAnanda points out, the evidence of the daSanAmI sannyAsI tradition has never been properly taken into account in the modern literature. It seems very likely that the tradition of four AmnAya maThas reflects historical fact. It is immaterial whether Sankara established them himself or whether these four maThas developed naturally at the places where the four famous [disciples](#) of Sankara lived and taught. It is clear that even if they were not actually established by Sankara himself, the four AmnAya maThas came into existence early in the history of post-Sankaran advaita vedAnta.

Of these four maThas, the Joshimath title had long been vacant, till it was revived in 1940 CE. Consequently, it does not have many ancient records. The Dvaraka and Puri maThas have, in the past, claimed a date of 5th century BCE for Sankara. This is partly based upon a dating of a grant by a king named sudhanva who is supposed to have been a contemporary of Sankara. Nothing else is known about this king, and the grant itself has not been dated with any accuracy. In any case, it should be remembered that the records of the Dvaraka and Puri maThas are rather fragmentary, because they have had patchy histories, with periods when there were no presiding SankarAcAryas. This is also accepted by the administrations of these institutions, and they do not hold to the 5th century BCE date with absolute certainty. Meanwhile, Sringeri has been the only maTha of the original four which has had an unbroken succession of maThAdhipatis. This may be no more than an accident of history, as southern India has not experienced as many political upheavals as the north. Given these facts, among the traditional sources, only the Sringeri records seem to lend themselves to critical historical analysis.

The Sringeri maTha's record states that Sankara was born in the 14th year of the reign of vikramAditya. The record does not give any clue about the identity of this king. Some 19th century researchers identified this king with the famous vikramAditya of the gupta dynasty, thereby postulating a date of 44 BCE for Sankara. A period of more than 700 years was then assigned to sureSvara, because the later successors in the Sringeri list can all be dated reasonably accurately from the 8th century downwards. This is rather anomalous, and can be resolved quite neatly, as pointed out by Mr. B. Lewis Rice in his Mysore Gazetteer. [5]

If one identifies the vikramAditya as a member of the Western cAlukya dynasty, which ruled from bAdAmi in Karnataka, one gets a much more reasonable date for Sankara. The cAlukya dynasty reached its greatest fame in the time of [pulakeSin II](#), a contemporary of Harshavardhana. According to historians, there were two kings named vikramAditya in this cAlukya dynasty - vikramAditya I ruled in the late 7th century CE, while vikramAditya II ruled in the early 8th century. [6] However, there is still some

ambiguity with respect to which of these two vikramAdityas is actually meant, but as with most Indian historical records, this is the best one can do. It is more reasonable to identify the vikramAditya of the Sringeri record with one of these two cAlukyan kings, who ruled from Karnataka, rather than the northern gupta king, whose empire did not include southern India. This interpretation of the Sringeri record is also consistent with the internal evidence from Sankara's works. In either case, this implies that the earliest date that one can postulate for Sankara has to be in the late 7th century CE. swAmI tapasyAnanda also quotes a letter from Sringeri, which makes it clear that this maTha claims nothing more than what its record states, interpretation of dates being the historian's job. [7] This is the sensible approach to take, given the fact that traditions in India tend to be rather ambiguous in their chronology.

In addition to these four original maThas, a number of other advaita maThas have come into being over the centuries, some of which are quite well-known. These maThas either started out as branches of the original institutions, or were set up as independent monasteries by notable sannyAsIs of the daSanAmI order. With the proliferation of such maThas came a number of "traditions," many of them conflicting with one another in details. For example, some of these maThas also claim to have been established by Sankara himself. [8] Some of them also claim 5th century BCE to be the date of Sankara.

**Conflicting Traditions:** Historically, such claims often resulted in serious conflicts with the traditions of the undisputed four. The propagation of such conflicts was helped by the fact that the various advaita maThas had become politically influential institutions, with access to land and revenue donated by various rulers at different times. It is a fact that this has led to fierce rivalries in the past among the followers of different maThas. Such rivalries are not unknown in northern India, but they have particularly been the cause of many problems in southern Indian sources. This is probably because of the intimate connection of the founders of the Vijayanagara empire with the Sringeri maTha, and the competition by other maThAdhipatis in the south for similar honors as traditionally accorded to the Sringeri maTha. Every southern maTha with a claim to be the "original" one wants to deny Sringeri's chronological primacy. This denial only has the effect of reinforcing the fact that Sringeri has been the most important advaita maTha for centuries before any of the other maThas even came into being. As such, their conflicting claims about Sankara's date have to be evaluated in the context of their political motivations in putting forth such dates.

While most of the conflicts among the various maThas can be dismissed as petty polemics, or as "bazaar gossip," as swAmI tapasyAnanda does, a serious historian needs to be aware of these problems among the traditional sources. No "tradition" about chronology should be accepted without critical analysis. For example, I find swAmI tapasyAnanda unwittingly contradicting himself in his introduction to the translation of the mAdhavIya, because he tries to concede as much as possible to all kinds of contrary "traditional" dates. There is no need to consider seriously the claim that 788 CE is the

date of one "abhinava Sankara," and to conclude that Sankara's date must therefore be much earlier. Firstly, the name abhinava Sankara is mostly used only as a title of respect. Thus, one such abhinava Sankara, the author of the *SrIrudra-bhAshya*, was called rAma brahmAnanda tIrtha, but he lived much later than the 8th century. [9] Even in the 20th century, various sannyAsins have been titled "abhinava Sankara" by their followers [10]. There may have been many such abhinava Sankaras over the centuries, but there is no independent evidence for the existence of someone named "abhinava Sankara" in the 8th cent. CE. Secondly, Sankara, the writer of bhAshyas to the brahmasUtras and upanishads, is the SankarAcArya who is relevant for the history of advaita vedAnta. When internal evidence from the bhAshyakAra's undisputed works shows that he lived not earlier than the 8th century CE, it follows that this "abhinava Sankara" theory is not sufficient reason for positing a date much earlier than the 8th century CE for Sankara himself.

Similarly, I find some of Prof. Karl Potter's statements to be quite misleading. [3] That a fifth advaita maTha at Kancipuram is very active today, does not mean that it has always been so, nor does such activity lend any special credibility to its claims to antiquity. The political influence and prestige that a maTha enjoys today also do not confer any legitimacy to such claims. It is inconceivable that the daSanAmI sampradAya would have overlooked a fifth maTha in choosing its affiliations. Claims to historicity that are made in a spirit of political one-upmanship seldom stand up to serious scrutiny. There is no necessary correlation between the modern activity of an advaita maTha and its claimed antiquity. Prof. Potter has also not consulted available historical evidence that enables us to date the origin of this fifth maTha. [11] There will be no cause for confusion if such independent evidence is also taken into account. Moreover, in addition to the four AmnAya maThas and a well-known fifth institution at Kancipuram, there are numerous other maThas in India, whose traditions are at least as valid as those of the Kanci maTha. To be really impartial, the traditions of all these other minor maThas in India should also be taken into account, but such a study has not attracted any scholarly attention.

The 5th cent. BCE date can be rejected without much discussion. It is much too early, and Sankara cannot be reasonably held to have been a contemporary of the Buddha. The only objection to this rejection of such an early date comes from those who believe that the actual date of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, should be earlier than the 9th cent. BCE, possibly as early as the 18th cent. BCE. Based on such an early date for the Buddha, it is argued that the possibility of a 5th cent. BCE date for Sankara should be taken seriously. However, all the available evidence points to the 5th cent. BCE as the best possible period for dating the Buddha. In any case, the proponents of the 5th cent. BCE date for Sankara also seem to forget that the evidence of Hsuan Tsang with respect to dharmakIrta is too strong to be neglected. That Sankara has quoted from dharmakIrta's work is confirmed by sureSvara. Therefore, even if the Buddha's date were to be drastically re-evaluated, and an 18th cent. BCE date accepted, this will simply not affect



Sankara's date at all. It must remain in the 8th cent. CE (near 750 CE, with a window of around 50 years on either side), as held by the major tradition and confirmed by internal evidence from Sankara's own works.

It must also be remembered that the 5th cent. BCE date does not really come from any ancient tradition, notwithstanding the high-pitched rhetoric of those who claim otherwise. This date has been proposed only in the last two centuries or so, during British times. In the post-Independence period, some people champion the 5th cent. BCE date because it helps bolster a unique kind of national pride: any great Indian should have necessarily lived before Jesus Christ! [[12](#), [13](#)] Part of this is a modern backlash against some of the early Indologists, whose belief in Biblical chronology colored their perception of Indian history. Still, these modern proponents of the 5th century BCE date perhaps forget that the date of Christ has little relevance to events in Indian history, except for fixing dates according to international convention. Surely, Sankara's greatness is not increased by an early BCE date, nor is it lessened by a date much later than Christ's.

It should also be remembered that what is said to be tradition is often very misleading. The traditions of the four maThas at Sringeri, Puri, Dvaraka and Joshimath may disagree about the date of Sankara, and also about who was the successor of Sankara. Notwithstanding this, the fact remains that each recognizes the other three paramparAs to be its equal in age and origin. The daSanAmI sannyAsIs also accept affiliation only with these four maThas. There can be no doubt that these four are the original maThas, dating close to Sankara's times, and that all other maThas are later ones. When traditional accounts conflict (and they do so more often than not), it is necessary to test each source for internal consistency, and then for compatibility with independent external sources. If a maTha's claimed list of gurus is not historically verifiable, its traditions about Sankara's date and life must not be accepted uncritically. This is all the more imperative in cases where even recent personalities, who lived in the 18th and 19th centuries, are dated to impossibly early times. It is quite easy to make up a "tradition" and a list of maThAdhipatis, much like the royal genealogies of some of India's erstwhile kings. Any source that does not meet the criteria of internal consistency and independent external confirmation should not be accepted. This applies as much to the traditions of the powerful and influential maThas as to those of the less well-known ones.

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# DA SANAMI SAMPRADAYA- THE MONASTIC TRADITION



[Transliteration Key](#)

The advaita tradition can be described in terms of two aspects - the textual/philosophical tradition of commentaries and sub-commentaries to the vedAnta works, and the religious tradition of renunciation (*sam.nyAsa*), which is emphasized to a great deal in SankarAcArya's works. The two aspects are quite intimately related to each other - most of the notable authors in the advaita tradition were members of the *sam.nyAsa* tradition, and both sides of the tradition share the same values, attitudes and metaphysics. The [philosophical tradition](#) is described in other pages at this site. This page is devoted to the *sam.nyAsa* tradition which continues to the present day. Sankara is traditionally said to have organized the **daSanAmI sampradAya** and established four maThas (monasteries) at **Sringeri** (in Karnataka), **Puri** (in Orissa), **Dvaraka** (in Gujarat) and **Jyotirmath** (in Uttar Pradesh). These maThas are representative of the geography of India, with one monastery each in the eastern, southern, western and northern regions. The successive heads of these and other advaita maThas are also called SankarAcAryas, after the original founder. In fact, Sankara is often called Adi SankarAcArya, or the first SankarAcArya, in order to distinguish him from his successors.

**The daSanAmI sampradAya:** The daSanAmI order is so called because of the ten (daSa) name (nAma) suffixes which these sannyAsIs adopt. These names are - bhAratI, sarasvatI, sAgara, tIrtha, purI, ASrama, giri, parvata, araNya and vana. These ten names are supposed to be distributed among the four maThas. However, the affiliation is nominal at best. The daSanAmI sannyAsIs do not have to be ordained at one of the maThas, nor do they have to reside at a maTha for any period of time. On the other hand, they are supposed to be peripatetic (*parivrAjaka* - monks who constantly keep traveling), with no fixed home, except for the period of cAturmAsya in the rainy season, when they stay put at one place. The heads of the maThas are also supposed to travel around the country for the better part of the year.

In northern India, the daSanAmI sannyAsIs are organized into a number of akhADas - jUnA, niranjanI, mahAnirvANI, aTal, AvAhan, Ananda and agni. Except for the agni akhADa, which is for brahmacAri initiates, the membership of all other akhADas is made up of daSanAmI monks. These akhADas have leaders known as mahAmaNDaleSvaras, who are usually elected during a kumbha mela [1, 2, 3]. The kumbha mela also offers an opportunity for akhADas to initiate large numbers of new sannyAsIs. The daSanAmI sannyAsIs tend to have only a nominal affiliation with their maThas, but most maintain a closer relationship with their akhADas. Among the ten names, araNya, ASrama, parvata, vana and sAgara are quite rarely seen nowadays. All daSanAmI monks belong to the tradition of *ekadaNDI sam.nyAsa*. They carry a staff consisting of a single wooden stick, symbolizing the essential identity of brahman and Atman.

It is important to remember that the advaita sampradaya is not a Saiva sect. The fact that both the prominent non-advaita schools of vedanta are vaishnava leads to a confusion among many modern researchers, who uncritically talk of all dasanamis as being Saiva ascetics. In reality, advaitins are non-sectarian, and they advocate worship of Siva and vishnu equally with that of the other deities of Hinduism, like Sakti, ganapati and others. Modern neo-vedantins, who are most strongly influenced by advaita vedanta, have no trouble accepting Moses, Christ and Muhammad also. Philosophically, classical advaita would disagree as much with the Saiva siddhanta and the Saiva vedanta schools, as with the vaishnava schools of vedanta. On the other hand, the God Siva is the archetype of the ascetic, and advaita vedanta lays great emphasis on samnyasa. Saiva schools also tend to be more non-dualistic in outlook than vaishnava schools, and Sankaracarya himself is venerated as an incarnation of Siva. Hence, the contemporary Sankaracaryas do wield a larger degree of influence among Saiva communities than among vaishnava communities, but that does not necessarily make them exclusively Saiva ascetics. The famous madhusudana sarasvati was an ardent devotee of krishna, while prakasananda was a Sakti-worshipper.

The major following of the gurus of the advaita tradition has been mostly among the [smartas](#), who integrate the domestic Vedic ritual with devotional aspects of Hinduism. The traditional pancayatana puja scheme of smarta worship is offered to Siva, vishnu, Sakti, ganesa and surya, as aspects of saguna brahman. skanda is sometimes added as the sixth important deity who is worshipped, especially in the south. The smartas also regard themselves as followers of Sankaracarya and his successors at the various mathas, but there is a lot of regional variation in this regard.

**The Amnaya mathas:** The four mathas established by Sankara are known in the tradition as the Amnaya mathas. Sankara is said to have assigned one of the four vedas to each of these mathas, and the acaryas and panditas of these four mathas continue the tradition to this day. Accordingly, the Puri matha is associated with the Rg veda, [Sringeri](#) with yajurveda, Dvaraka with sama veda and Jyotirmath with atharva veda. The ten dasanami suffixes are distributed among these four mathas - according to most traditions, puri, bharat and sarasvati with Sringeri; tirtha and asrama with Dvaraka; sagra, parvata and giri with Jyotirmath, and vana and aranya with Puri. Many notable [post-Sankaran authors](#), including surevara, jnanaghana, jnanottama, Anandagiri, bharat tirtha, vidyaranya and others, can be found among the heads of these mathas. Of these four, Sringeri is the only institution that has had an unbroken line of succession from Sankara. Among the other three mathas, the succession has been interrupted at one time or the other, for a variety of historical reasons. The longest hiatus in the line of succession was in the case of Jyotirmath, where the seat lay vacant for around 165 years. In the recent past, the Sringeri matha has been involved, directly or indirectly, in stabilizing the line of succession in the other three mathas.



**From L to R: SrI svarUpAnanda sarasvatI (Jyotirmath), SrI abhinava vidyA tIrtha (Sringeri), SrI niranjana deva tIrtha (Puri), SrI abhinava saccidAnanda tIrtha (Dvaraka) - Meeting at Sringeri in 1979.**

The successor to the title in a maTha is usually nominated by the presiding SankarAcArya of that maTha. It is quite normal to see SankarAcAryas who have become sannyaSIs directly from the student life, without ever having been gRhasthas. This is especially the norm in the Sringeri lineage. Thus, a SankarAcArya can be a very young man, sometimes barely out of his teens, when he takes charge at his maTha. On the other hand, the Puri lineage has seen many heads who have become sannyaSins quite late in their lives, after passing through the gRhastha stage. In cases where a SankarAcArya passes away without nominating a successor, or if there is a dispute about the succession, the head of one of the other maThas is consulted to resolve the issue. Within this century itself, there have been instances where the SankarAcAryas of Sringeri, Dvaraka, and Puri have been called upon to resolve succession issues in one of the other maThas. The Sringeri lineage names thirty-six successors to the SankarAcArya title, while Dvaraka has about seventy. The Puri list of SankarAcAryas has more than 140 names to date. The larger number of names in these two lists is probably because many of the presiding SankarAcAryas have been former gRhasthas, who took charge at a comparatively older age and consequently held charge for shorter periods. The line of the Jyotirmath has many gaps in it, an unfortunate circumstance of history.

The position of the SankarAcAryas in modern Hinduism has often (quite wrongly) been compared to that of the Pope in Roman Catholicism. The four SankarAcAryas do not issue catechisms for all Hindus, nor do they claim sole right to decide on doctrinal issues. SrImukham.s issued by the maThas are very different in nature from papal bulls or encyclicals, and unlike the [Vatican City](#), the four maThas do not enjoy sovereign status. Rather, they are governed by the federal and state laws on religious and charitable trusts and endowments in independent India, and are often answerable to governmental bodies.

However, this should not be construed to mean that the SankarAcAryas are insignificant or that their importance is overrated. They are held in high respect by almost all sections of Hindus, but they also tend to get blamed by the modern media, somewhat unfairly, for everything that goes wrong in Hindu society! For all that, however, the SankarAcAryas generally lead quiet, secluded lives, as befits monks, and tend to avoid media attention. There are, of course, exceptions to this norm, and recent developments in India, especially the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue, have forced all of them to take more active roles in public life.

**Recent history of the four AmnAya maThas:**

- **Sringeri**: **SrI "ugra" narasimha bhAratI** (1817 - 1878) was well-known throughout India as a very saintly personality. He travelled far and wide, and had disciples all over India and even in Sri Lanka. He was succeeded by **SrI saccidAnanda SivAbhinava narasimha bhAratI** (1878 - 1912), who rediscovered kAlaDi, Adi SankarAcArya's birth-place, and instituted Sankara JayantI celebrations all over India. He also arranged for the publication of a comprehensive collection of Sankara's works, and initiated the practice of having the various SankarAcAryas meet for informal discussion and decision making. Following his lead, meetings took place at Kaladi, Hardwar, Prayag etc. His successor, **SrI candraSekhara bhAratI** (1912 to 1954), was an acclaimed *jIvanmukta*. He wrote a commentary to Sankara's *vivekacUDamaNi*. The first meeting of all four SankarAcAryas (*caturAmnAya sammelanam*) in the 1200 year old tradition of post-Sankaran advaita, took place at Sringeri, in 1979, under the leadership of **SrI abhinava vidyA tIrtha** (1954 - 1989). **SrI bhAratI tIrtha**, the presiding SankarAcArya of Sringeri, succeeded to the title in 1989. The SankarAcAryas of the four AmnAya maThas and the head of the Kanci maTha held another conference at Sringeri in 1993, following the events of December 1992 at ayodhya, to express their concern at the politicization of religious issues, and resolved to lead a non-political effort to solve the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue amicably.

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- **Dvaraka**: **SrI trivikrama tIrtha** was the head of the Dvaraka maTha till the year 1921. He was succeeded by **SrI bhAratI kRshNa tIrtha**, who had a very interesting career. Beginning as a student of vedAnta at Sringeri, he became a sannyAsin under SrI trivikrama tIrtha of Dvaraka, and succeeded to the SankarAcArya post at Dvaraka, in 1921. Soon after the first world war, he was prosecuted along with the Ali brothers and other Muslim leaders, by the colonial British government for treason, in connection with his involvement in the Indian Independence movement, and his support of the Khilafat movement. He is also said to have discovered some ancient sUtras of basic arithmetic, which have been published as a book, under the title "Vedic mathematics". He was asked to take over the Puri maTha in 1925, when that seat fell vacant. Accordingly, **SrI svarUpAnanda tIrtha** and **SrI yogeSvarAnanda tIrtha** followed at the Dvaraka seat. In the year 1945, **SrI abhinava saccidAnanda tIrtha** was nominated as the SankarAcArya of Dvaraka, with SrI bhAratI kRshNa tIrtha performing the installation ceremonies. Before taking over at Dvaraka, SrI abhinava saccidAnanda tIrtha was the head of the Mulabagal maTha in Karnataka. This was an old branch of the Dvaraka maTha, established in the 17th century, and with his appointment to the Dvaraka seat, the collateral lineage of Mulabagal maTha was

merged with that of Dvaraka. In later years, he was called upon to mediate the succession issues at both Puri and Jyotirmath. He also renovated the samAdhi site of Adi Sankara at Kedarnath with assistance from the government of Uttar Pradesh. He passed away in 1982, following which **SrI svarUpAnanda sarasvatI** of Jyotirmath assumed charge at Dvaraka. SrI abhinava vidyA tIrtha of Sringeri consecrated his appointment, and SrI svarUpAnanda has held dual charge at both Dvaraka and Jyotirmath since then.

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- **Puri:** This maTha is historically connected with the famous jagannAtha temple in Puri. It is also called the govardhana maTha, and has an important branch in Puri itself, called the SankarAnanda maTha. In the beginning of the century, the head was **SrI Sankara madhusUdana tIrtha. SrI bhAratI kRshNa tIrtha**, who was then at Dvaraka, took over as the SankarAcArya of Puri in 1925. SrI bhAratI kRshNa tIrtha visited the USA in the 1950's, at the invitation of the Self-Realization Fellowship. During this time, *SrI Sankara purushottama tIrtha* supervised the Puri maTha on his behalf. After SrI bhAratI kRshNa tIrtha passed away in 1960, he was succeeded by **SrI yogeSvarAnanda tIrtha**, whose period was quite short, as he passed away in 1961. This led to a brief period of uncertainty during which the succession at the maTha was being litigated. In 1964, **SrI niranjana deva tIrtha**, who was one of the nominees named in SrI bhAratI kRshNa tIrtha's will, was consecrated at the Puri seat by SrI abhinava saccidAnanda tIrtha of Dvaraka. SrI niranjana deva tIrtha is known for his unpopular political views on volatile issues affecting Hindu people, like sati and cow protection. In 1992, he stepped down after nominating **SrI niScalAnanda sarasvatI** as his successor, who is currently in charge at Puri.

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- **Jyotirmath:** Also known as Joshimath, it is located near Badrinath in the Himalayas, because of which it is also known as the Badrinath maTha. After a long hiatus of 165 years, this maTha was revived in the year 1941, under **SrI brahmAnanda sarasvatI**, a disciple of SrI kRshNAnanda sarasvatI, who was originally from Sringeri. The appointment was made by a committee of pundits from Varanasi, and SrI brahmAnanda's accomplishments helped re-establish the Jyotirmath as an important center of traditional advaita teaching in northern India. When he passed away in 1953, SrI SAnTAnanda sarasvatI succeeded him at this seat, according to the terms of a will. However, there was a dispute regarding the capacity of SrI SAnTAnanda for the title and also about the validity of this will.

This resulted in a major [controversy](#) that remains unresolved.

karapAtrI swAmi (hariharAnanda sarasvatI), a well-known disciple of SrI brahmAnanda, was asked to take over the Jyotirmath title, but he declined. To resolve the dispute, another committee of pundits from Varanasi was formed, under the guidance of karapAtrI swAmi and SrI abhinava saccidAnanda tIrtha of Dvaraka. **SrI kRshNabodhASrama** was appointed as the new head of the maTha. When he passed away in the early 1970's, he nominated **SrI svarUpAnanda sarasvatI**, another disciple of SrI brahmAnanda, as his successor. SrI svarUpAnanda continues as the SankarAcArya of Jyotirmath, and has also been in charge of Dvaraka since 1982.

Some people consider the rightful succession of the Jyotirmath title to be along the disciple line of **SrI SAntAnanda sarasvatI**. He is said to have retired in 1980, in favor of his disciple, SrI vishNudevAnanda sarasvatI, who has since passed away. SrI SAntAnanda also passed away in December 1997, and has been succeeded by **SrI vAsudevAnanda sarasvatI**. Thus, there are at least two separate lineages at Jyotirmath currently, although it is SrI svarUpAnanda sarasvatI who is endorsed by the other AmnAya maThas.

There is a third ascetic, named **SrI mAdhavASrama**, who is another claimant to the Jyotirmath title, who contests both the claims of SrI svarUpAnanda and SrI vAsudevAnanda. SrI mAdhavASrama is a disciple of SrI kRshNabodhASrama, who was nominated to the Jyotirmath title in the 1960's. His contention is that SrI svarUpAnanda cannot be accepted as the head of two different AmnAya maThas (Dvaraka and Jyotirmath), so that the Jyotirmath title has to revert to another disciple of SrI kRshNabodhASrama. According to publications supporting his claim, he was anointed in 1993 or 1994, under the guidance of SrI niranjana deva tIrtha, the former SankarAcArya of Puri. Thus, the dispute between two parties for the title of Jyotirmath SankarAcArya has now become a dispute among three different parties.

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**Other maThas:** Other than the four AmnAya maThas, there are a number of well-known maThas owing allegiance to advaita and the SankarAcArya lineage. Many of them were originally branches of one of the four AmnAya maThas, established officially by the parent maTha, and which grew into more or less independent institutions over time. Notable among these are the branch maThas at Kumbhakonam (now based in



Kancipuram, *Contact Address: No. 1, Salai Street, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu 631 502, INDIA*), Sankhesvar, Kudali, Virupaksha (Hampi), Kolhapur (Karavir pITham), Sivaganga, Sakatapuram etc. In recent times, the maTha at Kancipuram has been very active. Sometimes, notable sannyAsIs of the daSanAmI order start their own maThas, to cater to the spiritual needs of their followers. An example is the famous **upanishad brahmendra** maTha at Kancipuram, which was founded in the 18th century by rAmacandrendra sarasvatI. Sometimes, succession controversies (as in the present Jyotirmath) also leads to the establishment of separate maThas. A few maThas of the nambUdiri community in Kerala also trace their foundation to Sankara himself, as do the sumeru and pAdukA maThas in Varanasi. However, the [Kavale maTha](#) of the gauDa sArasvata community in Goa traces its origin in 740 CE not to SankarAcArya, but through another disciple of govinda bhagavatpAda.

In general, the various maThas in India operate quite independent of one another. The SankarAcAryas of the four original maThas do not normally interfere with one another, nor do they seek to exercise any control, administrative or spiritual, on any of the other advaita maThas in India, unless specifically requested to do so. Although their heads are sannyAsIs who lead completely detached lives, the advaita maThas are not immune to contemporary social and political pressures. Some maThas deal with these pressures better than others. Manifestations of these pressures can be seen in the sometimes acrimonious rivalries between followers of two different maThas, as also in the recurrent succession disputes in some of them. Such succession disputes sometimes lead to protracted litigation and the establishment of independent maThas elsewhere.

**Modern Institutions:** In addition to the more traditional advaita maThas and akhADas, various sannyAsIs of the daSanAmI order have established some of the more well-known modern institutions, like the [Ramakrishna Math and Mission](#) (swAmI vivekAnanda), the [Self-Realization Fellowship](#) (paramahansa yogAnanda), the [Divine Life Society](#) (swAmI SivAnanda), [Yoga Vedanta Center](#) (swAmI vishNudevAnanda), the [Chinmaya Mission](#) (swAmI cinmayAnanda), and others. Among these, the founders of the Ramakrishna Mission, the Divine Life Society and the Chinmaya Mission trace their spiritual descent through the Sringeri paramparA. The Self-Realization Fellowship has links to the Puri paramparA. These organizations usually teach some variant or the other of advaita vedAnta, generally combined with yoga practice, or an acceptance of the prophets of the Semitic religions, and/or an emphasis on social service. These modern institutions tend to have as much a presence in the West as in India, and their ideologies have come to be called by the generic name of neo-vedAnta. It remains to be seen whether these institutions will be the catalysts for the growth of a truly universal philosophy/religion that has been a dream of most of their founders.

There have been countless other nameless, realized masters over the centuries, who have realized the non-dual brahman. As a living tradition of philosophy and religion, advaita is not always restricted to daSanAmI sannyAsIs in the lineage of SankarAcArya. For example, within the 20th century CE, one has the example of the famous mystic [Sri](#)

[ramaNa mahaRshi](#) (1879 - 1950), who did not formally take sam.nyAsa, but was nevertheless a *jIvanmukta*, who taught pure advaita.

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# **Philosophers**

## ADVAITA VEDANTA BEFORE SANKARACARYA



[Transliteration Key](#)

There is no doubt that there was a tradition of advaita vedAnta dating to before Sankara's times, although Sankara and his writings are of prime importance in advaita vedAnta. However, SankarAcArya is regarded not as the founder of advaita vedAnta, but only as the premier exponent of the ancient doctrine. Sankara himself salutes the teachers of the *brahmavidyA sampradAya* in the beginning of his commentary on the bRhadaNyaka upanishad. The roots of advaita thought have been traced back to the Rgveda samhita by one author. [1]

Sankara's paramaguru, (teacher's teacher) **gauDapAda**, was the author of the mANDUkya kArikas that are attached to the mANDUkya upanishad. It might be difficult to consider the upanishadic Rshis and **bAdarAyaNa**, the author of the brahmasUtras, to be advaitins, because the same Rshis are also claimed by other vedAnta traditions. bAdarAyaNa is usually identified with vyAsa, who is included in the advaita guru-paramparA. The names given here are taken to be advaitins in the sense that the upanishads and the brahmasUtras can be consistently interpreted according to advaita.

### ● upanishadic Rshis -

With some justification, both **uddAlaka AruNI** of the chAndogya upanishad and **yAjnavalkya** of the bRhadaNyaka upanishad can be considered to be votaries of a non-dualistic/monistic philosophy. The name of uddAlaka is famous through the sadvidyA section of the chAndogya upanishad. Here, uddAlaka teaches the sAmaveda mahAvAkya *tattvamasi* to his son Svetaketu, using a number of examples. yAjnavalkya is the key figure in the bRhadaNyaka upanishad. It is through his teaching that one learns the mahAvAkya of the yajurveda, *aham brahmAsmi*. It is also in the course of his dialogue with his wife maitreyI, that one finds the via negativa teaching of *neti, neti*, and the famous passage 'yatra tu dvaitamiva bhavati, .... yatra tvasya sarvam AtmaivAbhUt, ....'. This forms the basis for the later theory of two truths (paramArtha and vyavahAra) in advaita, in which all duality is said to be in the vyAvahArika level, and is seen by the one who does not know the supreme AtmajnAna. On the other hand, there is no duality for one who knows the paramArtha jnAna i.e. 'yatra tvasya sarvam AtmaivAbhUt' - for whom all this is indeed known to be the Atman itself. Although the upanishads are not systematic expositions of a unique philosophical system, the seeds of the later philosophical systematization of advaita vedAnta lie in the teachings of these two upanishadic Rshis.

### ● purANic figures -

The vishNu purANa is in the form of a dialogue between **parASara** and his student maitreya. The Rshi parASara also finds mention in the advaita guru-paramparA. In this

purANa, the dialogue of the sage, **Rbhu** with **nidAgha** is also recounted, where the supreme teaching of non-duality is elaborated briefly. This **Rbhu gItA** is also found in other purANas. Similarly, **ashTAvakra** is another legendary name associated traditionally with the teaching of advaita in the **ashTAvakra-gItA**. These figures are thus early advaitins referred to in the purANas.

### ● Others -

Since Sankara provides some quotes from previous writers in his tradition, we come to know of names of a few pre-Sankaran vedAntins, although their works are no longer extant. Thus, **bhagavAn upavarsha** is the author of *vRttis* to the **brahmasUtra** and also probably the **bhagavad-gItA**. **sundara pANDya** wrote *vArttikas* to upavarsha's *vRttis*, while **brahmAnandin** wrote the *chAndogyopanishad-vAkya*, and **drAviDAcArya** wrote a *bhAshya* on **brahmAnandin's vAkya**. [2-4] **kASakRtsna**, whose opinion is listed in the **brahmasUtra** (*avasthite: - iti kASakRtsna:*), may also be taken as a pre-Sankaran advaita vedAntin. The same name is also found in old grammatical tradition. Another very important pre-Sankaran advaitin is **bhartRhari**, the grammarian. He is the author of works on grammatical philosophy like the *vAkyapadIya*, and a commentary on **patanjali's mahAbhAshya**, the famous work on **pAnini's** grammar. He is also credited with a collection of poems called *nIti-Sataka*, *SRngAra-Sataka* and *vairAgya Sataka*. Although **bhartRhari** is mainly a grammarian, and his theory of *sphoTa-vAda* is not accepted by classical advaita vedAnta, his philosophy of grammar is explicitly based on the non-dual brahman. Also, even with philosophical disagreements, **bhartRhari's vairAgya-Sataka** is often quoted by later advaitins. To be sure, there were also pre-Sankaran representatives of non-advaita vedAnta traditions, many of whom seem to have been *bhedAbheda-vAdins* of one kind or the other - proponents of a doctrine of identity-in-difference. Chief among them are the names of **auDulomi**, **Asmarathya** (both mentioned in the **brahmasUtras**), **bhartRprapanca**, **brahmadatta**, **bhartRmitra** and **bodhAyana**.



# GAUDAPADA



[Transliteration Key](#)

gauDapAda is the first historically known author in the advaita vedAnta tradition, whose work is still available to us. He may be said to be the pioneer of the [ajAti vAda](#) school in advaita vedAnta. gauDapAda is traditionally said to have been the guru of govinda bhagavatpAda, who was the guru of SankarAcArya. Not much is known about gauDapAda, the person. The name gauDa indicates that he was a north Indian by birth, and many places, from Kashmir to Bengal, have been postulated as his home. The sArasvata brAhmaNas of Goa and northern (coastal) Karnataka, who are said to have immigrated from north India, trace the lineage of the [Kavale maTha](#) to gauDapAda, but not through SankarAcArya. However, one branch of the sArasvata brAhmaNa community is affiliated to the [citrapura maTha](#), the lineage of which is traced through SankarAcArya, while yet other (gauDa) sArasvata groups are followers of the dvaita school.

gauDapAda composed the *gauDapAdIya kArikAs* (GK), which constitute an expository text on the mANDUkya upanishad. The GK is divided into four books (prakaraNas), titled *Agama-prakaraNa*, *vaitathya-prakaraNa*, *advaita-prakaraNa* and *alAtaSanti-prakaraNa* respectively. The kArikAs of the first book are traditionally found interspersed with the prose passages of the mANDUkya upanishad, while the other three books are separated from the body of the upanishad. Other works that are attributed to gauDapAda are: *sAm.khyakArikA bhAshya*, *uttaragItA bhAshya*, *nRsimhottaratApanI upanishad bhAshya*, and a couple of works on SrIvidyA upAsanA - *subhAgodaya* and *SrIvidyAratnasUtra*.

There is a lot of controversy in modern critical scholarship about the identity and the philosophy of the author(s) of the GK. Thus, there is one opinion that each book is probably written by a different author. And there is another opinion that all books are written by the same author. [1] One author traces connections between gauDapAda's kArikAs and the later pratyabhijnA school of Kashmir Saivism. [2] From the various vedAnta schools comes another kind of controversy. According to the advaita school, all four prakaraNas are writings of a human author named gauDapAda, and are therefore not regarded as Sruti, even though the first prakaraNa is found interspersed with the sentences of the mANDUkya upanishad. According to the dvaita school, however, 27 kArikAs of the first prakaraNa are not compositions of a human author, and are therefore as much Sruti as the prose passages of the mANDUkya upanishad.

The most notorious controversy about the GK is about the influence of mahAyAna buddhism on its author. Curiously enough, even those rival vedAnta schools which criticize advaita as *pracanna-bauddham* (buddhism in disguise) do not quote the GK to substantiate their criticism. However, among modern scholars who are interested in studying Eastern philosophies such as advaita vedAnta and mahAyAna buddhism, this

has been a hot topic for debate. [3]

It is clear that the GK has been written in the context of a vedAntic dialogue with various schools of mahAyAna buddhism, more prominently the yogAcAra and madhyamaka schools. GK IV (*alAtaSanti prakaraNa*) refers to the mahAyAna school of buddhism as agrAyana. Moreover, the very metaphor of the *alAtacakra* is a peculiarly buddhist one. The *alAtacakra* is a burning firebrand that is waved in a circle, creating an impression of a continuous circle of fire. It is interesting to note here that gauDapAda characteristically inverts the use of the buddhist metaphor. The buddhist uses the metaphor to insist that the impression of a continuous circle is an illusion, there being nothing more than the momentary spatial positions of the burning brand. Hence, from the buddhist perspective, it is plainly an error to see the burning circle as having any *svabhAva* - "own-nature". gauDapAda on the other hand points out that the burning brand is itself the substratum of its momentary spatial positions and the illusion of a burning circle caused by waving the brand. Hence, according to him, even if the burning circle is an illusion, its *svabhAva* is nothing other than that of the burning brand.

Seen in context, the entire discussion in the GK seems to be a continuation of the age-old *svabhAva* vs. *nihsvabhAvatA* and *Atman* vs. *nairAtmya* debates between vedAntic and buddhist schools. According to Sankara's commentary on these kArikAs, gauDapAda uses buddhist metaphor and buddhist terminology to come to vedAntic conclusions regarding the ultimate existence of the Atman = brahman as the substratum (*adhiThAna*) of all experience. That he speaks the buddhist language does not mean that he is a buddhist in disguise. Moreover, it is not very surprising that gauDapAda, a vedAntin, is very familiar with buddhist doctrine. Tradition recounts that the famous pUrva-mImAm.saka, kumarila bhaTTa, learnt from bauddha and jaina teachers, with a view to understanding their schools before he wrote his own works on mImAm.sA. Besides, by its very nature, classical Indian philosophical writing proceeds by means of demarcating one's own position from that of another's, pointing out where they are similar and on what issues they differ. An intimate knowledge of the other's philosophical system is necessary for such refutation to take place.

The contention of some modern scholars that gauDapAda's philosophy is nothing more than buddhism clothed in vedAntic colors is based on two errors, that do not do justice to either mahAyAna buddhism or to advaita vedAnta.

- The first and the more serious error lies in interpreting the madhyamaka concept of SUnyatA as an Absolute, equivalent to the Atman or brahman of vedAnta. A careful reading of nAgArjuna's *mUlamadhyamaka-kArikAs* and other works shows what pains the madhyamaka school takes to avoid the extreme of absolutism (*SAsvata-vAda*). While the buddhist *ajAtivAda* maintains, "There is no birth," gauDapAda's argument about *ajAtivAda* says, "There is an Unborn." Thus, gauDapAda clearly upholds the Atman as the absolute. For nAgArjuna, no view is correct, because every view ultimately entails some absolutist position, an extreme

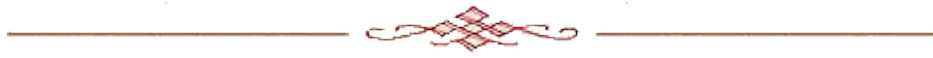
that is avoided by the buddhist middle path. gauDapAda, on the other hand, is inclusivistic in his scope. He argues that every view entails an absolutist position, and precisely for this reason, all views are said to be non-conflicting (*avirodha*) with the absolutism of advaita.

There are other points of contrast. For nAgArjuna, there is no need to affirm a substratum (*adhishThAna*) of phenomena, whereas for gauDapAda, the Atman is the substratum of all experience. The madhyamaka non-duality is in terms of the emptiness (*SUnyata*) of all phenomena, while in the vedAnta view of non-duality, phenomena are possible only due to the essential reality of the Atman, which is pure consciousness. The madhyamaka school does not describe *SUnyata* as an independent absolute entity, whereas the advaita vedAnta emphasizes brahman/Atman as an Absolute. In the light of these significant differences, seeing nothing but mahAyAna buddhism in gauDapAda's advaita vedAnta is impossible without seeing madhyamaka buddhism itself through vedAnta-tinted glasses. As for the other schools of buddhism such as vijnAnavAda, the madhyamaka school itself criticizes them for holding views that entail consciousness as an Absolute. gauDapAda possibly agrees with this evaluation of the vijnAnavAda school.

- The second error lies in ignoring the fact that advaita vedAnta no doubt developed to a substantial degree before the time of composition of GK IV. Already in the paingala upanishad of the Sukla yajurveda, which Sankara quotes in his bhAshya, there is a detailed exposition of non-duality through the method of *adhyAropa-apavAda*, (sublation of superimposition). With Sruti being interpreted in this way, advaita vedAnta, with all its "illusionist" conclusions, follows very naturally: the ultimate reality of only the substratum is upheld, and the superimposition is denied an independent reality. Obviously, gauDapAda hails from this vedAntic tradition, and in his kArikas, he addresses his contemporary mahAyAnists.

It is also important to remember that the development of both mahAyAna buddhism and vedAnta took place more or less simultaneously, and within the same larger geographical area. It would be foolhardy to expect that there would not have been some interaction between the two most powerful streams (brAhmaNa and bauddha) of Indian philosophical thought. It is clear from the history of Indian philosophical thought that both brAhmaNa and bauddha sides held steadfastly to their basic axioms, although the individual systems within each stream held diverse opinions on various philosophical issues. On the whole, it seems as if reading too much mahAyAna buddhism into the GK is jumping to conclusions. This is not a chauvinistic defense of advaita vedAnta with respect to buddhism. I only want to point out that there are many subtle points which make the two systems very different, although both systems describe Reality as being beyond name and form. It would be well to remember that the converse criticism, i.e. that mahAyAna buddhism is but vedAnta clothed in buddhist colors, has been addressed by as early a buddhist writer as bhAvaviveka (6th century CE).





# SANKARACARYA



[Transliteration Key](#)

SankarAcArya is arguably the most important philosopher in the history of advaita. The story of [Sankara's life](#) is recounted in traditional works called [Sankara-vijayams](#). SankarAcArya's guru, govinda-bhagavatpAda, was a disciple of [gauDapAda](#). Just as SankarAcArya is considered to be an incarnation of Siva, govinda is popularly regarded as an incarnation of AdiSesha.

It is SankarAcArya's interpretation of the source texts of vedAnta that lays the foundation for classical advaita. It is also largely because of Sankara's composition of bhAshyas on the brahmasUtras, [upanishads](#) and the bhagavad-gItA, that these three have become important in all vedAnta literature as the *prasthAna-trayI*.

The following bhAshyas (commentaries) are his principal compositions: [1]

1. *upanishad (Sruti prasthAna) bhAshyas* on

- aitareya upanishad
- bRhadAraNyaka upanishad
- ISa upanishad
- taittirIya upanishad
- kaTha upanishad
- chAndogya upanishad
- kena upanishad
- muNDaka upanishad
- praSna upanishad
- mANDUkya upanishad and kArikAs

2. *bhagavadgItA (smRti prasthAna) bhAshya*,

3. *brahmasUtra (nyAya prasthAna) bhAshya*.

In addition to the upanishads in the list above, SankarAcArya also quotes the kaushItakI, SvetASvatara, mahAnArAyaNa, jAbAla, paingala and a few other upanishads in his brahmasUtra bhAshya. There are bhAshyas on SvetASvatara, kaushItakI and nRsimhatApanI upanishads, the attribution of which is doubtful.

Sankara is also said to have written texts in other Indian philosophical traditions. There are texts on yoga, like the *yogasUtra bhAshya vivaraNa* and a commentary on the *adhyAtma paTala* of the Apastamba dharmasUtras, [2] and commentaries on the *vishNu sahasranAma* and *lalitA triSati*. A sAm.khya work called *jayamangalA* and a nyAya work called *sthirasiddhi* are also attributed to him.

A large number of advaita treatises, called *prakaraNa granthas*, [3] are also usually attributed to Sankara. There is doubt within modern critical scholarship, regarding the authorship of these works. It is possible that works of later advaitins have been assumed to be those of Sankara himself, as his successors in the various maThas have also come

to be called SankarAcAryas. However, the living advaita tradition itself views the *prakaraNa granthas* as Sankara's own compositions. These works are often used to teach beginners. The important ones are:

1. *upadeSasAhasrI*
2. *Atmabodha*
3. *aparokshAnubhUti*
4. *daSaSlokI*
5. *SataSlokI*
6. *vivekacUDamaNi*
7. *vAkyavRtti*
8. *pancIkaraNa*

Other such compositions include *svAtmanirupaNam*, *tattvabodha*, *ekaSlokI*, *yogatArAvallI*, *svarUpAnusandhAnam*, *Atmapancakam* and *prapancasAra*. A few [stotrams](#) (hymns) are also attributed to Sankara. These range from the famous *bhaja govindam* hymn to the *dakshiNAmUrti stotram*. There is a large number of sub-commentaries to Sankara's works, called *TikAs*, *TippaNis*, *vArttikas* and *dIpikAs*, which will be noticed in the section on post-Sankaran advaitins.



## MANDANA MISRA



[Transliteration Key](#)

According to tradition, maNDana miSra was originally a pUrva mImAm.saka, who debated with Sankara, and lost. He is then said to have become a disciple of Sankara, and taken the name [sureSvara](#).

A number of works on grammar (vyAkaraNa - *sphoTasiddhi*) and vedic exegesis (pUrva mImAm.sA - *vidhiviveka*, *bhAvanAviveka* and *mImAm.sAnukramaNika*) have been written by maNDana miSra. He is also the author of *vibhramaviveka*, a treatise on theories of error, in which he refers both to the "*anyathAkhyAti*" theory of pUrva mImAm.sA and the "*anirvacanIyakhyAti*" theory of advaita. Moreover, although he is traditionally held to be a disciple of kumArila bhATTa, the most famous pUrva mImAm.saka, maNDana clearly holds non-dualistic philosophical views in *vidhiviveka* and *sphoTasiddhi*. maNDana also severely criticizes kumArila's mImAm.sA theory of language in the *sphoTasiddhi*, and following bhartRhari, he upholds the non-duality of **Sabda-brahman**.

maNDana miSra's treatise on advaita, the [brahmasiddhi](#), consists of four chapters, containing both prose and verse sections. He shows a sharp knowledge of the crucial aspects of all the systems which he refutes in the *brahmasiddhi*, including nyAya-vaiSeshika, pUrva mimAm.sA, bauddha and jaina schools and other vedAnta schools. He is arguably the first among a galaxy of advaitin scholars who made substantial contributions to other schools of Indian philosophy. There are a number of commentaries to the *brahmasiddhi*, including *brahmasiddhi-Tika* by SankhapANi, *abhiprAya-prakASika* by citsukha, and *bhAvaSuddhi* by AnandapUrNa vidyAsAgara. It is said that [vAcaspati miSra](#)'s *tattva samIkshA*, which is not available now, was a commentary on the *brahmasiddhi*.

The traditional identification of maNDana miSra with sureSvara has been doubted in the modern literature. Much can be said on both sides of this issue. It has been pointed out that maNDana miSra and Sankara are most probably contemporaries, and that maNDana must have known of Sankara's philosophical views when he wrote the *brahmasiddhi*. Many themes are common to both maNDana and Sankara, e.g. that the reality of the universe lasts only until liberation, which is nothing more or nothing less than realizing the true nature (*svarUpa*) of the Atman; and that the jIva is really brahman, but appears to be different by false knowledge and limiting adjuncts.

Perhaps this similarity is to be expected, because these are some of the cardinal principles of advaita, and any advaitin of note would necessarily follow these lines. There does seem to be some contrast between maNDana and Sankara on some other issues. maNDana shows a tendency to accommodate what is known as "*jnAnakarmasamuccayavAda*" - a combined path of jnAna and karma to achieve

liberation. On the other hand, Sankara is uncompromising in emphasizing jnAna and denying that karma can directly lead to liberation, except for its role in *cittaSuddhi*, i.e. as a means of purification. And sureSvara's independent work is titled *naishkarmyasiddhi* - the achievement of the state of the absence of karma. maNDana and sureSvara also differ on the question of the locus of avidyA. maNDana holds that the avidyA rests on the jIva, and has brahman for its object. sureSvara maintains that avidya both rests on brahman and has brahman for its object. This difference in view about the nature and locus of avidyA is also seen in post-Sankaran advaita. [vAcaspati miSra](#) takes the same view as maNDana does, and authors in the [bhAmatI](#) sub-school expand their views along these lines. However, the [vivaraNa](#) writers mostly follow sureSvara's line of reasoning, and hold that brahman is both the locus and object of avidyA. Many contemporary scholars think that this difference of opinion is a late, post-Sankaran development. In this connection, it is important to remember that maNDana was a contemporary of Sankara, so that this difference of opinion indeed has an old history.

Did maNDana miSra, the author of *brahmasiddhi*, write several treatises on pUrva mImAm.sA earlier? If so, did maNDana, the pUrva mImAm.saka, change his philosophical views later in his life to become maNDana, the vedAntin? Is maNDana, the pUrva mImAm.saka, the same as maNDana, the vedAntin? Or are they different people? Finally, is maNDana the same as sureSvara? Such questions will probably never be answered to everybody's satisfaction. It is interesting to note in this connection that, in the post-Sankaran advaita literature, the names sureSvara and viSvarUpa are used interchangeably to refer to the *vArttikakAra*, while maNDana, the author of the *brahmasiddhi*, is usually referred to only as the *brahmasiddhikAra*. However, many traditional hagiographies, including the [mAdhavIya Sankara-vijaya](#), identify the two.



## SANKARACARYA'S DISCIPLES



**Sankara with disciples: [sureSvara](#),  
[padmapAda](#), [toTaka](#) and [hastAmalaka](#)**

[Transliteration Key](#)

● **sureSvara** is the most prolific writer among Sankara's immediate disciples. His advaita writings include [vArttikas](#) on SankarAcArya's *bRhadAraNyakopanishad bhAshya* and *taittirIyopanishad bhAshya*, [naishkarmyasiddhi](#), an independent exposition of advaita, and minor works like *pancIkaraNa vArttika*, *mAnasollAsa*, a commentary on Sankara's *dakshiNAmUrTi stotram*. Other works include *bAlakrIDA*, *svarAjya siddhi* and *kASImoksha vicAra*. Tradition also identifies sureSvara with [maNDana miSra](#), and with viSvarUpa, a disciple of kumArila bhaTTa. Sankara is said to have gone to viSvarUpa's home in order to debate with him. The debate ended in Sankara's triumph, and viSvarUpa became a sannyAsI disciple of Sankara, under the name of sureSvara. If this identification is correct, then numerous other works on pUrva mImAm.sA, vyAkaraNa and other subjects are also the work of the same person.

According to tradition, sureSvara composed the *taittirIyopanishad bhAshya vArttika* in honor of Sankara, his guru, who belonged to the taittirIya SAKhA of the kRshNa yajurveda. Since he himself belonged to the kANva SAKhA of the Sukla yajurveda, he next wrote the *bRhadAraNyakopanishad bhAshya vArttika*, with an introduction known as *sambandha vArttika*. The *naishkarmyasiddhi* was composed before he wrote these two *upanishad bhAshya vArttikAs*. The *naishkarmyasiddhi* has attracted the attention of many later commentators, including jnAnottama miSra, who wrote the *candriKA*, citsukha, who wrote *bhAva tattva prakASika*, jnAnAmRta, who wrote *vidyAsurabhI* and rAmadatta, the author of *sArArtha*. sureSvara was installed as Sankara's successor at the southern advaita maTha at [Sringeri](#). An old samAdhi at Sringeri is traditionally identified as the site where sureSvara was buried. Another tradition connects him with the western advaita maTha at Dvaraka.

● **padmapAda** is the author of the [pancapAdika](#), a commentary on Sankara's *brahmasUtra bhAshya*. There are a few traditions current about him. His name was

originally sanandana, and like his guru, he hailed from southern India. The story goes that while learning with Sankara at kASi, he was once on the opposite bank of the gangA, when he heard Sankara call out his name. Oblivious to the fact that there was a wide river between him and his guru, he started walking across it, and the river miraculously supported his step by sprouting lotus flowers (padma) under his feet, as he crossed it. Hence he was given the name padmapAda.

padmapAda is said to have once written a complete commentary to Sankara's *brahmasUtra bhAshya*. However, his original manuscript was lost in a fire orchestrated by a jealous uncle of his. He had read out the portion of his work dealing with the first five padas of the brahmasUtras once before to Sankara. On learning of the loss of the original manuscript, Sankara dictated this portion back to him from memory. Hence the work came to be known as the *pancapAdikA*. This story is recounted in some of the [Sankaravijayam](#) texts. In any case, the extant work titled *pancapAdikA* ends abruptly after elaborating on Sankara's *bhAshya* upto the fourth sUtra. padmapAda is said to have succeeded Sankara at the eastern maTha at Puri. The *pancapAdikA* has a commentary named vivaraNa, by [prakASAtman](#), which forms the basis for the later [vivaraNa](#) school of advaita vedAnta. Other works attributed to padmapAda include *vijnAna dIpikA*, *AtmAnAtmaviveka*, and a commentary on Sankara's *Atmabodha*, titled *vedAntasAra*. padmapAda is associated with the pUrI maTha as the first guru after Sankara.

● **toTaka** is the author of two works, [toTakAshTakam](#) and [SrutisArasamuddhAraNa](#), both in the delightful toTaka meter. The tradition about him is that he was originally a quiet student named giri, who did not impress Sankara's other students as being very scholarly. However, Sankara would not begin his regular class without his being present. The other students once asked Sankara to begin, without waiting for giri to finish his other chores. In order to teach them giri's true worth, Sankara is said to have caused him to understand the deepest truths in a moment's insight. giri returned singing the praises of his guru in the [toTakAshTakam](#), stunning the other students, who had not believed him to be capable of scholarly composition. He was thereafter known as toTakAcArya. He also wrote the *SrutisArasamuddhAraNa* set to the same meter. An *AtmAnAtmavivekavidhi* is also said to be his composition. toTakAcArya is traditionally said to have been Sankara's successor at the northern maTha at Jyotirmath near badrinAth. toTakAcArya is sometimes wrongly identified in some modern literature with [Anandagiri](#). toTaka was a direct disciple of SankarAcArya, while Anandagiri, who wrote many sub-commentaries to Sankara's works, was a disciple of SuddhAnanda, and he lived much later, in the 13th century CE.

● **hastAmalaka** is known mainly through a poem called the [hastAmalakIya Sloka](#). According to the [mAdhavIya Sankaravijayam](#), hastAmalaka's parents lived in a village called SrIbali, near gokarNa (Karnataka). He was born already Self-realized. His behavior as a child caused his parents a lot of concern, because the young boy would remain dumb and completely unaffected by happenings around him. The troubled parents brought him to Sankara, who asked him who he was. The boy replied in verse,

describing his essential nature as the non-dual Atman. Sankara realized that this seemingly dumb boy was actually like the vedic Rshi vAmadeva, and asked the parents to leave the boy with him as a sannyAsin, who was then called hastAmalaka. This name comes from a well-known metaphor. The words hastAmalaka and karatala-Amalaka are often used in advaita writings, when the immediate knowledge of the Atman is said to be grasped as if it were the gooseberry (Amalaka) fruit in one's hand (hasta). As such, the name hastAmalaka denotes this disciple's depth of AtmajnAna. His dialogue with Sankara came to be known as the *[hastAmalakIya Sloka](#)*. Some of Sankara's disciples felt that such an accomplished master as hastAmalaka would be the ideal candidate to write sub-commentaries to Sankara's bhAshyas. However, Sankara did not want to ask him to descend from his height of non-dualistic *brahmAnubhava*, even to write commentaries to his own works, and asked sureSvara and padmapAda to write them instead. Another work called *vivekamanjarI* is attributed to hastAmalaka, who is said to have been appointed at the western advaita maTha at Dvaraka, under the guardianship of sureSvara.





# POST-SANKARAN ADVAITINS - AN OVERVIEW



[Transliteration Key](#)

- [jnAnaghana, jnAnottama etc.](#)
- [vAcaspati miSra](#) and the [bhAmatI](#) school
- [prakASAtman](#) and the [vivaraNa](#) school
- [sarvajnAtman](#) and [vimuktAtman](#)
- [Srlharsha](#)
- [citsukha and others in the 13th century CE](#)
- [Anandagiri](#)
- [bhAratIrtha, vidyAraNya](#) and [SankarAnanda](#)
- [sadAnanda yogIndra](#)
- [prakASAnanda sarasvatI](#)
- [nRsimhASrama](#) and his disciples
- [appayya dIkshita](#) and others
- [madhusUdana sarasvatI, the great kRshNa bhakta](#)
- [sadASiva brahmendra, upanishad brahmendra](#)
- [advaita authors in this century](#)

A large number of teachers and writers have left their impress upon the advaita tradition during the 12 centuries after SankarAcArya. This page mentions only the seminal figures in the history of post-Sankaran advaita. True to the advaita spirit of not identifying with the body, our writers rarely give any clues to personal details in their texts. Consequently, all dates mentioned here rely upon the academic research that has been done within the last two centuries. Traditional details are mentioned where necessary, and it is important to remember that some historical details are still being disputed in the literature.

A list of post-Sankaran authors in advaita will have to include both sannyAsins and householders. Moreover, some householder authors took the vows of sannyAsa at a later stage in their lives, which means that some authors are known by more than one name (e.g. janArdana - Anandagiri). A general rule of thumb is that an author whose last name is **miSra**, or a variant of **upAdhyAya**, or **dIkshita** is a householder, while the names of sannyAsins are indicated by [daSanAmI](#) suffixes. However, there are some early sannyAsin authors whose daSanAmI suffixes are not known, such as **jnAnaghana** (grand-disciple of sureSvara, and author of *tattvaSuddhi*), his disciple, **jnAnottama** (the author of *vidyASrI*), [vimuktAtman](#), [citsukha](#), [sukhaprakASa](#), [amalAnanda](#) and others. In these cases, that they were sannyAsins is known by the terms muni, yati, yogi etc. used by later commentators. The sannyAsin authors were generally associated with the four maThas established by Sankara and the other maThas established later. Thus, jnAnaghana and jnAnottama are found on the succession list of the Sringeri maTha, and Anandagiri is found on the list of the Dvaraka maTha. Meanwhile, the householder

scholars formed the communities in which the sannyAsins were born, and from which the maThAdhipatis were chosen.

The name of **vAcaspati miSra** (9th century CE) stands out among the early post-Sankaran authors in the advaita tradition. His commentary, named *bhAmatI* [1], on SankarAcArya's *brahmasUtra bhAshya*, is celebrated, and has given birth to a sub-tradition within advaita, called the [bhAmatI school](#). Many commentaries to *bhAmatI* have been written in the course of the centuries. vAcaspati miSra is said to have written a commentary named *tattva samIkshA* to [maNDana miSra](#)'s *brahmasiddhi*, which is now unfortunately lost to us. He is also well-known as a scholar who wrote authoritative treatises in various Indian philosophical traditions, including nyAya-vaiSeshika (*nyAyasUcInibandha* and *tAtparyaTIka*), yoga (*tattvavaiSaradI*), mImAm.sA (*nyAyakaNika*) and sAm.khya (*tattvakaumudI*), in addition to advaita vedAnta. His erudition made him famous as a *sarvatantra-svatantra*, a title of high respect in India.

The next important author from the 10th century CE is **prakASAtman**, who wrote the *vivaraNa* [2] to padmapAda's *pancapAdika*. This work has also received a long line of commentaries from later authors, and lends its name to the other important sub-tradition in advaita vedAnta, namely the [vivaraNa school](#). prakASAtman also wrote the *SabdanirNaya* and the *nyAyamuktAvallI*, a commentary on the *brahmasUtras*. **sarvajnAtman**, the author of *samkshepa-SarIraka*, *pancaprakriyA* and *pramANa-lakshaNa* [3] is another notable 10th century author. sarvajnAtman salutes his guru **deveSvara** in his works. The name *deveSvara* is usually seen as a synonym of *sureSvara*, Sankara's disciple, and on this basis, sarvajnAtman is sometimes identified with **nityabodhaghana**. However, in the *pramANa-lakshaNa*, sarvajnAtman mentions the name of *deveSvara*'s guru as *devAnanda*, whose guru was *SreshThAnanda*. Hence, there is some confusion over whether sarvajnAtman was a direct disciple of *sureSvara* or not.

sarvajnAtman was probably a younger contemporary of **vimuktAtman**, the author of *ishTasiddhi*. [4] One author named jnAnottama, who lived in the 12th century CE, wrote the *candrikA* on *sureSvara*'s *naishkarmyasiddhi*, and a *vivaraNa* to the *vimuktAtman*'s *ishTasiddhi*. This jnAnottama lived in the region of Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu. His full name in the manuscripts is **jnAnottama miSra mahopAdhyAya**, which indicates that unlike the jnAnottama mentioned earlier, he was a householder scholar. There is some evidence from the last verse of the *candrikA* that this author later became a sannyAsin by name **sarvajnASrama**.

Between the 9th and 13th centuries, SankarAcArya's exposition of advaita came under attack by rival vedAntin teachers, such as bhAskara (*bhedAbheda*), rAmAnuja (*viSishTAdvaita*), nimbArka (*dvaitAdvaita*), and AnandatIrtha (*dvaita*). There was also a resurgence of nyAya-vaiSeshika philosophy around the same time, culminating in the fully developed navya-nyAya school of later times. After this period, all later authors in the advaita tradition concentrate on addressing issues raised by philosophers from

nyAya, and rival schools of vedAnta. This is in contrast with the early authors whose major concerns were with the tenets of the sAm.khya, mahAyAna buddhists and the pUrva mImAm.sakas.

**SrIharsha**, who wrote the *khaNDana-khaNDa-khAdya*, [5] is an important author in the history of advaita vedAnta. He mainly addresses the nyAya school, and points out fallacies in their definitions of various concepts. Such criticisms lead to a later reworking of the nyAya system, which soon lost its earlier naive realism. After SrIharsha's time, logical formalism took center stage, culminating in the highly formal logical system of the *navya-nyAya* (new logic) school. The *khaNDana-khaNDa-khAdya* was commented upon both by advaitins and naiyyAyikas. SrIharsha is also famous as the author of the *naishAda-carita*, which relates the purANic story of nala and damayantI. He is known for using extremely difficult grammatical constructions in the sam.skRta language, and constructing sentences using words in such a way as to yield multiple meanings. For example, the word *yAgeSvara* can be split as *yAgAnAm ISvara:*, the lord of sacrifices, or as *yA ageSvara:*, the lord of mountains, and both meanings are significant in the same sentence. SrIharsha's work has been commented upon by many later advaitins, and also by authors in the nyAya-vaiSeshika tradition.

**citsukha**, a disciple of **jnAnottama**, wrote a number of works, including commentaries on the *khaNDana-khaNDakhAdya*, *brahmasiddhi* and *naishkarmyasiddhi*. His *tattvapradIpikA* is more famously known as *citsukhI*. [6] Like SrIharsha before him, citsukha also makes effective use of the dialectical method seen in the works of nAgArjuna, the buddhist philosopher. Both acknowledge this fact, but criticize the madhyamaka school for not affirming the ultimate reality of brahman. **Anandabodha**, **AnandAnubhava**, **akhaNDAnanda** and **anubhUtisvarUpAcArya** are other important authors in the 13th century. **sukhaprakASa**, a disciple of citsukha, wrote commentaries on Anandabodha's and anubhUtisvarUpa's works. **amalAnanda**, a disciple of **sukhaprakASa**, wrote the *vedAntakalpataru* on the bhAmatI and also a *pancapAdikAdarpaNa*, thus forming an early link between the bhAmatI and vivaraNa schools.

**Anandagiri** (also known as **AnandajnAna**), a disciple of **SuddhAnanda**, is well-known as the author of a number of *TikAs* and *TippaNas* on SankarAcArya's *upanishad bhAshyas*. [7] **anubhUtisvarUpa**, mentioned earlier, was an important figure in the *sArasvata* grammatical tradition, and was probably another guru of Anandagiri's. He wrote the *prakaTArtha-vivaraNa* on Sankara's *brahmasUtrabhAshya* and a *mANDUkya-kArikA-bhAshya*. Both SuddhAnanda and Anandagiri are mentioned in the lineage of the Dvaraka maTha. Anandagiri is popularly known as the **TikAkAra**. His *tarka sangraha* is a refutation of the vaiSeshika categories, and is a very popular text in the tradition. Anandagiri is probably identical with **janArdana**, the author of *vedAntatattvAloka*. Anandagiri is often mistakenly identified with [toTakAcArya](#), an immediate disciple of SankarAcArya. The [Sankara-vijaya](#) of anantAnandagiri, a much later author, is also mistakenly attributed to Anandagiri. Needless to say, both identifications are erroneous.

By far the most important authors in the 14th century are **SankarAnanda**, **bhAratI tIrtha** and **vidyAraNya**. Together, the latter two wrote a number of definitive works, including the *adhikaraNa ratnamAlA* (also called *vaiyAsika nyAyamAlA*), *pancadaSI*, *jIvanmuktiviveka*, *anubhUtiprakASa* and *vivaraNaprameyasangraha*. [8] Both authors were from the [Sringeri](#) lineage, and were disciples of **vidyAtIrtha** (also called **vidyAsankara**), as attested by the evidence of the *anubhUtiprakASa*. vidyAraNya is traditionally known to be the guiding spirit behind the founders of the Vijayanagar empire in southern India. That vidyAraNya and bhAratI tIrtha wrote together is mentioned by their direct disciple, **rAmakRshNa bhAratI**, who wrote the *pancadaSI-tAtparyabodhinI*.

In the *pancadaSI*, vidyAraNya mentions **SankarAnanda** as another guru of his. This SankarAnanda was a disciple of **AtmAnanda**, and he wrote many *dIpikAs* on the upanishads belonging to the atharvaveda. He also wrote the *AtmapurANa* and the *bhagavad-gItA-tAtparyabodhinI*. He is said to have been a native of Tiruvidaimarudur in Tamil Nadu, and is also associated with the holy places Srisailam and Ahobilam in Andhra Pradesh. His name is also found in the lineages of a few branch maThas of the Sringeri and Puri maThas. [9] vidyAraNya is normally identified in modern literature with a mAdhava, but the identification remains controversial. The [mAdhavIya Sankaravijaya](#) is traditionally attributed to vidyAraNya. The *sarvadarSana-sangraha*, which is a compendium of Indian philosophical thought, presents the tenets of the major contemporary schools of thought in a hierarchical fashion, with advaita vedAnta as the ultimate truth.

There are many authors from the 14th and 15th centuries CE. The growth of the Vijayanagar empire and its vassal states in southern India was a crucial factor in the preservation and transmission of all Indian religious and philosophical traditions. Beginning with the sons of sangama, the founders of the Vijayanagar empire, the kings of the first dynasty identified closely with advaita vedAnta and regarded the SankarAcAryas of the [Sringeri maTha](#) as their gurus. A *brahmasUtravRtti* is even attributed to **prauDhadevarAya**, one of the early Vijayanagar kings. The later dynasties which ruled the Vijayanagar empire were predominantly Vaishnava, but the kings encouraged and patronized teachers from all sects and faiths, including Muslims. All aspects of traditional Indian culture found patronage in the empire. Among the texts written in the 15th century, the *vedAntasAra* of **sadAnanda yogIndra** [10] enjoys great popularity. It is often used as an introductory text in the advaita tradition. sadAnanda also wrote the *vedAntasiddhAnta-sAra-sangraha*, *bhavaprakASa* on the gItA and the *brahmasUtra-tAtparyaprakASa*.

In the 16th century, **prakASAnanda sarasvatI**'s *vedAntasiddhAnta-muktAvallI*, [11] and *siddhAntadIpa*, a commentary on this work by **nAnA dIkshita**, represent a move away from the influential bhAmatI and vivaraNa sub-schools. These two authors argue for the [dRshTi-sRshTi vAda](#), but not many other works are found along this line. prakASAnanda also wrote a few works in the SAkta tradition, such as *tArAbhakti tarangiNI*. This work

is also not very widely known, although the worship of saguNa brahman in the form of the Goddess has been intimately connected with the advaita vedAnta tradition, since ancient times. The SrIvidyA tradition, in particular, has been largely assimilated into advaita communities, especially in southern India.

In philosophy, the vivaraNa sub-school continued to be very important, as represented by **nRsimhASrama** (disciple of **jagannAthASrama**), who was an extremely influential teacher in the 16th century. His *bhedadhikkAra* [12] is an early example of the polemical debate between dvaita and advaita philosophers. He also wrote *advaitadIpikA*, *tattvaviveka*, *vedAntaratnakoSa*, a commentary on padmapAda's pancapAdikA, *tattvabodhinI* on sarvajnAtman's *samkshepasArIraka* and *bhAvaprakASikA* on prakASAtman's *vivaraNa*. He and his disciples, nArAyaNASrama, rAmASrama and others flourished in the south and wrote many texts. One of the most famous disciples of nRsimhASrama was **dharmarAja adhvarIndra**, whose *vedAnta paribhAshA* is immensely popular. [13] All these authors of the vivaraNa school pay a lot of attention to epistemological issues, and dharmarAja systematizes the *pramANas* (source of valid knowledge) in pUrva mImAm.sA and advaita vedAnta.

In the 16th-17th centuries, a number of south Indian householder scholars, surnamed **dIkshita**, rose to prominence in the advaita tradition. The name dIkshita is used only for those who have performed certain Vedic sacrifices. Chief among them was **appayya dIkshita**, whose most famous work was the *siddhAntaleSasangraha*. [14] He also wrote the *parimala* on amalAnanda's *kalpataru*, thus representing the bhAmatI sub-school. However, appayya dIkshita points out that the differences between the vivaraNa and bhAmatI schools are not because of philosophical disagreement on fundamental principles, but a result of differing technique and the emphasis on different issues, such as epistemology in one and ontology in the other. Like vAcaspati miSra, appayya dIkshita has also written many texts on nyAya-vaiSeshika, pUrva mImAm.sA and other schools. He also wrote the *madhva-tantra-mukha-mardanam*, attacking the dvaita school, and an autocommentary to it, called *vidhvamsana*. Many descendents of appayya dIkshita were great scholars and authors in various fields of traditional learning well into recent times, including **tyAgarAja makhin** of the 19th century. Popularly known as Raju Sastrigal, this scholar wrote the *sadvidyAvilAsa* on the famous uddAlaka-Svetaketu dialogue of the *chAndogya upanishad*. swAmI SivAnanda, who founded the Divine Life Society, was another descendent of appayya dIkshita.

Tradition records that appayya was initially a follower of the *SivAdvaita* school of the 13th century teacher, **SrIkaNTha**. appayya wrote the *SivArkamaNidIpikA* on SrIkaNTha's brahmasUtrabhAshya. In the *SivAdvaitanirNaya* and the *Sivatattvaviveka*, appayya dIkshita tries to accommodate SrIkaNTha's thought within Sankaran advaita vedAnta. He represents the close connections between Saivas and the followers of SankarAcArya during this period in southern India. **narasimha bhAratI**, who was an AcArya in the [Sringeri](#) line, and a contemporary of appayya dIkshita, wrote a commentary to the SivagItA. An earlier example of this synthesis is **mallanArAdhya**,

who wrote the *advaitaratna*, to which nRsimhASrama wrote a commentary called *tattvadIpana*. mallanArAdhya's name indicates that he belonged to the ArAdhya group of brAhmaNas, who greatly respected the vIraSaiva leader basavaNNa, but unlike the vIraSaivas, did not reject the authority of the vedas. A great motivating factor for this was surely the fact that south Indian vaishNava religion had given birth to two schools of vedAnta, namely the viSishTAdvaita of rAmAnuja and the dvaita of AnandatIrtha. Meanwhile, advaitins and Saivas found common cause in various social, religious and political issues, which is reflected in appayya's works. This understanding must have been helped by the religious customs of most traditional advaitins. For example, a Sivalinga is consecrated at the site where a sannyAsin of the advaita order is buried, and advaitins themselves worship Siva and vishNu as equally valid forms of saguNa brahman. However, appayya dIkshita was no narrow sectarian. He is known to have composed a commentary on the *yAdavAbhyudaya*, a work of vedAnta deSika, a vaishNava leader. The inclusivistic and non-sectarian nature of the followers of Sankara is also seen from other customs and texts dating from this period.

**bhaTTojI dIkshita**, the great grammarian scholar from the north was a disciple of appayya dIkshita. bhaTTojI's brother, **rangojI bhaTTa**, wrote advaita works such as *advaitacintAmaNi* and attacked the dvaita school of AnandatIrtha in his *madhvassiddhAnta-bhanjanI*. bhaTTojI wrote *advaitakaustubha*, a *dIpana* on nRsimhASrama's *tattvaviveka*, and the *madhvamata-vidhvamsana* against dvaita. rangoji's grandson, **lakshmiNrsimha**, wrote the well-known *Abhoga* commentary in the bhAmatI line.

**madhusUdana sarasvatI**, disciple of **viSveSvara sarasvatI** and **mAdhava sarasvatI**, is the most celebrated name in the annals of the great dvaita-advaita debate. He also flourished in the 16th century. His *advaitasiddhi* [15] is a classic work, and most advaita teachers maintain that all the logical issues raised by the dvaita school of AnandatIrtha have been more than sufficiently answered by madhusUdana. His *gUDhArthadIpikA* on the bhagavadgItA is another well-known treatise. In addition, he wrote the *ISvarapratipatti-prakASa*, *vedAntakalpalatikA*, *sArasangraha* on sarvajnAtman's *samkshepa-SArIraka*, and the justly famous *siddhAntabindu* on SankarAcArya's *daSaSlokI*. madhusUdana sarasvatI was a great devotee of Lord kRshNa. Just like appayya dIkshita, who integrated SivAdvaita into advaita vedAnta, madhusUdana bridged the sAtvata school of pAncarAtra vaishNavism and advaita vedAnta philosophy. It is also interesting to note that madhusUdana boldly differs from Sankara in some of his interpretations of the brahmasUtras and the gItA, although he salutes Sankara and sureSvara in the most reverential terms.

madhusUdana sarasvatI is popularly reported to have been a contemporary of the Mughal emperor Akbar. It is said that on Akbar's suggestion, madhusUdana initiated large numbers of sannyAsins from kshatriya and vaiSyas communities to the daSanAmI orders, in order to form a group of martially trained ascetics to protect the people. This most probably reflects historical fact. Armed *nAga* sannyAsin warriors, tracing their origins to madhusUdana sarasvatI, and affiliated with the daSanAmI akhADas, were a

component of almost every Rajput army in northern India, till fairly recent times. Tradition also recounts that viTThaleSa, the son of vallabhAcArya of the SuddhAdvaita *pushTimArga* school, studied under madhusUdana sarasvatI, who thus forms a crucial link between advaita vedAnta and many vaishNava sects in the north.

In the 18th century, **sadASiva brahmendra** and **upanishad brahmendra** were very important teachers in southern India. sadASiva brahmendra was a disciple of **paramaSivendra sarasvatI** (author of *Siva gItA vyAkhyA* and *dahara vidyA prakASikA*) and grand-disciple of **abhinava nArAyaNendra sarasvatI**, who wrote many *upanishad dIpikAs*. **sadASiva** wrote *AtmavidyAvilAsa*, *advaitarasamanjarI* and other popular works. [16] Numerous legends are reported about his saintliness, the miracles he worked and the height of his brahman realization. His simple *kIrtanas* are meant to teach advaita values to even the most illiterate person, and are very popular in Carnatic music today. He passed away in Nerur in Tamil Nadu, where annual *ArAdhanas* are held at his samAdhi-sthala. The sannyAsins in sadASiva brahmendra's lineage lived and taught in the extreme south of India, and were widely known, but their maTha affiliations, if any, are not known.

**rAmacandrendra sarasvatI**, disciple of **vAsudevendra sarasvatI**, was popularly called **upanishad brahmendra**. He was the first author in the advaita tradition to write commentaries on all the [108 upanishads](#) listed in the muktikopanishad. His commentaries are considered to be authoritative, and are quite popular among sannyAsin communities in the south. In the tradition of *samanvaya* used in the brahmasUtras, he harmonizes the various doctrines found in these texts, and weaves their extensive religious lore into the consistent philosophical framework of Sankaran advaita. upanishad brahmendra lived and taught in Kancipuram in the south. He established his own maTha at Kanci, which continues to this day, under the leadership of illustrious sannyAsins. Tyagaraja, the great composer in Carnatic music, was a disciple of upanishad brahmendra.

**The 20th century:** In the 20th century, there has been an enormous amount of activity in terms of publishing manuscripts, translating works of the advaita masters, and writing commentaries in English and in Indian languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Bengali. The "neo-Vedantin" groups have contributed immensely towards bringing a greater awareness of advaita philosophy to the West and the common man in India. The list of people is too large to mention, so here I only mention those who have composed philosophical texts in sam.skRta in the traditional style. I also exclude Indian and Western academic scholars and philosophers, who were non-dualists, whether due to an interest in traditional advaita vedAnta or otherwise. This is because I believe that while these other authors are contributing a lot to the interest in advaita philosophy, those who carry on the work of writing sam.skRta commentaries and teaching their disciples in the traditional way represent the core of the [living advaita tradition](#).

A few authors stand out among the 20th century savants in the advaita daSanAmI tradition. One is **SrI candrasekhara bhAratI** of **Sringeri**, the world renowned *jIvanmukta*, who wrote the *vivekaUDamaNi bhAshya*. [17] This commentary was reportedly begun by his guru, **Sri saccidAnanda SivAbhinava nRsimha bhAratI**. It is incomplete, with no commentary to the last few verses of the work. Another important author is **SrI saccidAnandendra sarasvatI** of the Adhyatma Prakasa Karyalaya, Holenarsipur, who brought the critical thinking of modern academic scholarship to the advaita tradition. He wrote the *brahmavidyA-rahasya-vivRti* on the chAndogya upanishad, *gItASastrArtha-viveka*, *vedAntaprakriyA-pratyabhijnA* and *kleSapahAriNI* on sureSvara's *naishkarmyasiddhi*, in addition to many other texts in English and Kannada on the advaita tradition. [18] A third author is **SrI vidyAnanda giri**, who wrote a *Tika* to **toTaka**'s *SrutisArasamuddhAraNa*. [19]

Among the householder scholars of recent times, particular mention may be made of **Vasudev Sastri Abhyankar**, author of *advaitAmoda*, **N. S. Anantakrishna Sastri**, who wrote *advaitatattvasudhA* and other works, **Kadalangudi Natesa Sastri** (1878-1961), whose periodical, *Aryamata samvardhinI* published many upanishads and bhAshyas, with Tamil translations and **Tetiyyur Subrahmanya Sastri**, whose *Sankara Gurukulam* school has produced many scholars.

This brief survey of post-Sankaran authors in the advaita tradition attests to its basic continuity irrespective of India's numerous historical upheavals. A large number of the teachers in the tradition have remained anonymous, as they taught only select students, and did not write commentarial texts. Great teachers and authors are found from all over India, but the scholastic tradition has always been stronger in the south. The sannyAsins travelled far and wide all over India, preaching basic religious values to the masses and teaching philosophy to competent students. These teachers often lived and taught side by side with Saiva siddhAntins, viSishTAdvaitins, dvaitins, bhedaBhedavAdins, leaders of various bhakti movements, Jains, Muslims and others. As no human being lives in a vacuum, the rapid changes in India's social, political and religious landscape made their presence felt in the personal lives of the post-Sankaran teachers in advaita. We see teachers of the stature of appayya dIkshita, madhusUdana sarasvatI and prakASAnanda sarasvatI bringing various Saiva, vaishNava and SAKta religious groups, with their own legacies, within the fold of the orthodox advaita vedAnta tradition. The leadership of teachers of advaita vedAnta contributed immensely to the inclusivistic nature of Hinduism, and encouraged a tolerant attitude towards diverse religious practices, that is so essential to a pluralistic society. However, through it all, the basic "Great Equation" of advaita vedAnta (*Atman = brahman*) has been firmly adhered to. The tradition continues to this day, and possesses an enormous amount of resilience to continue well into the future.





# **Philosophy**

# INDIAN PHILOSOPHIES



[Transliteration Key](#)

There are various traditional schools of philosophy in India, often classified into orthodox (*Astika*) and heterodox (*nAstika*) systems. This classification is mainly based upon the acceptance or otherwise of the vedas. [\*\*\*] The vedas are four in number - Rg, yajus, sAma and atharva. Each veda consists of mantra portions (hymns), also called karma kANDa, and brAhmaNa portions (in prose and verse) including [upanishads](#) (esoteric doctrine) and AraNyakas (forest treatises), also called jnAna kANDa.

A key concept in understanding the structure of Indian philosophies is that of *purushArtha* - the goals of mankind. As far as life in this world is concerned, these goals are three - *dharma* - to lead an ethical life, *artha* - to acquire wealth, position and social/political status, and *kAma* - to fulfil all other desires, including sexual desire. The fourth *purushArtha*, namely *moksha* - salvation/liberation, deals not with life in this world, but with the eternal destiny of the individual. The various Indian schools of philosophy and religion differ mainly on questions of *dharma* and *moksha*.

The heterodox Indian schools explicitly reject the claim of the vedas to being an independently valid source of knowledge about *dharma* and *moksha*. These schools are:

- [lokAyata or cArvAka](#) (materialists)
- [bauddha](#) (including a number of schools of Buddhism)
- [jaina or syAdvAda](#) (Jainism, including digambara and SvetAmbara groups)

The cArvAka school has died a natural death in India. It is said to be based on the *lokAyata sUtras* of **brHaspati**. Most of our information about the cArvAkas comes from the *tattvopaplavasimha* of **jayarASi**, and from later anthological texts. It is usually portrayed as a crass materialism, which promoted immoral behavior, and endorsed an early Indian equivalent of Machiavellian politics. The cArvAkas are said to have recognized only *artha* and *kAma* as valid goals in life, both *dharma* and *moksha* not being amenable to direct perception, and therefore invalid. A more charitable view regards this school as an Indian version of skepticism.

Buddhism is a world religion, having spread to all parts of Asia, and is now spreading to Europe and the Americas too. In India itself, Buddhism has more or less died out, except in the north-east, and in Ladakh, near Kashmir. Buddhism is returning to India in recent times, with the formation of the neo-Buddhist communities in Central India, and the presence of Tibetan refugees and the Dalai Lama. In contrast, Jainism has always flourished all over India, and is practised by large numbers of Indian trading communities. Jainas are found from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in the south to the Gangetic plains in the north. Gujarat and Rajasthan have significant Jaina populations.

Both Buddhism and Jainism place a high value on *dharma* and *moksha*, but deny the validity of the vedas in this regard.

The orthodox schools are traditionally counted as six in number (shaD darSana), usually grouped in pairs, to form three pairs. These are:

- [nyAya](#) and [vaiSeshika](#)
- [yoga](#) and [sAm.khya](#)
- [pUrva and utara mImAm.sA](#) (The word mImAm.sA usually refers to pUrva mImAm.sA, while utara mImAm.sA is more popularly called vedAnta.)

**nyAya-vaiSeshika:** nyAya is the school of Indian logic. It is based on the *nyAya sUtras* of **gautama**, and a long tradition of commentaries. It is very realistic in outlook, and has historically amalgamated itself with the vaiSeshika, which is the old Indian school of atomism. The *vaiSeshika sUtras* of **kaNAda** (or kaNabhuk, the 'atom-eater') and its line of commentaries form the basis of this school. Here, the entire universe is considered to be ultimately composed of 'atoms' (*aNu*) of the old five elements (earth, water, fire, light and space). Laws of combination of atoms to form 'molecules' (*dvyANuka*, *tryANuka* etc.) were also formulated. Authors of nyAya and vaiSeshika works freely drew upon each other's principles, to form the combined school.

According to nyAya-vaiSeshika thought, the individual soul is supposed to be a substance, atomic in size and other qualities. Another one of the important features of nyAya thought is that it offers a number of cosmological, teleological and anthropic arguments for the existence of a Creator God. The vedas are generally regarded to be compositions of this Creator. The standard solution to the question of human liberation is to follow the teachings of the vedas, and perform the requisite sacrifices, in order to attain a heaven. A number of these arguments are extremely similar to those offered by theologians from the Judaic, Christian and Islamic religions. The nyAya-vaiSeshika school has not seen any new developments for a long time now. They have been mostly replaced by the *navya-nyAya* (neo-nyAya) school, which specializes in a rigorous logical formalism, comparable with modern mathematical formal logic.

**sAm.khya-yoga:** The first teacher of the sAm.khya school is said to be **kapila**, one of the famous Rshis or siddhas in Indian mythology. The oldest texts of the sAm.khya school are the *sAm.khya kArikas* of **ISvarakRshNa**. This text and its commentaries enumerate 24 fundamental principles, which constitute the universe. 22 of these are evolutes of one more basic principle, called *prakRti*. The other principle is *purusha*, the individual soul, whose liberation consists of isolation from *prakRti*. Thus, the basic scheme is one of duality, based on two fundamental principles, *prakRti* and *purusha*, although this school also allows for an infinite number of *purushas*. There is no real place for a Creator God in this scheme, nor is there any great emphasis on the vedas. However, none of the sAm.khya authors explicitly deny the validity of the vedas, which allows their inclusion among the *Astika* thinkers. There is another set of texts, deriving from the so-called *sAm.khya sUtras*, attributed to **kapila**. There is a commentary in this

line, by **vijnAnabhikshu**, a 17th century author, but after him, there has not been much development of sAm.khya thought.

The *yoga sUtras* of **patanjali** form the basis for the yoga school of thought. Generally, the principles of sAm.khya are accepted in the texts on yoga, so that these two schools are usually paired together. However, *ISvara*, an Omniscient God, as a 25th principle, is an important feature of the yoga school. There is a commentary on the *yoga sUtras* by vyAsa, to which SankarAcArya has written a sub-commentary. The metaphysics and psychology of yoga (and sAm.khya, through yoga) have been absorbed into the vedAnta schools. Indeed, most of the post-Sankaran non-advaita schools of vedAnta can be seen as restatements of the sAmkhya pluralism, with an added theistic dimension, which comes from the influence of bhakti in Indian religion.

Thus, these four schools emphasize one or more of logic, psychology, ontology and metaphysics. They do not necessarily rely on *Sruti* (i.e. the vedas) as an independent pramANa (valid source of knowledge), though they do not explicitly reject it either. vaiSeshika, sAm.khya and yoga schools of thought do not offer an exalted place to the vedas. The nyAya school makes these texts to be the compositions of a Creator God, but the existence of this Creator is itself established only through the inferential arguments proposed by the logicians. Thus, the validity of the veda is dependent on the validity of their logical analysis. When the nyAya authors say that the vedas also offer evidence for the existence of a Creator God, they commit the fallacy of arguing in a circle - the veda is valid because it was composed by a Creator God, and the Creator God exists because the veda says so. This is a logical fallacy committed by most theologians, and is not acceptable to the [mImAm.sA](#) and [vedAnta](#) schools of thought.



\*\*\* An alternative definition of an *Astika* school is according to its acceptance of an Omniscient, Omnipotent Creator God. In this viewpoint, all the usual *nAstika* schools remain so, but both sAm.khya and pUrva mImAm.sA would have to be described as *nAstika*. It is very interesting to note that such a notable mImAm.sA author as kumArila bhaTTa argues vigorously for the unquestioned validity of the vedas, and equally vigorously against the notion of a Creator God. And it should also be noted that, according to this definition, the [ajAti vAda](#) school of advaita vedAnta would be considered *nAstika* by rival schools of vedAnta. Therefore, the demarcation of *Astika/nAstika* thought, according to the acceptance of the vedas or otherwise, is historically and doctrinally more accurate.

**Online Resources:** The [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) has well-written articles on the schools of Indian Philosophy. The [Darshana Page](#) is a very useful and informative site.



# THE UPANISHADS



[Transliteration Key](#)

The upanishads are expositions of doctrine, typically found in the concluding portions of the brAhmaNas and AraNyakas of the four vedas. A number of upanishads are extant today, with commentaries on them by representatives of various schools of vedAnta. The upanishads are not to be seen as uniform books - each text is connected to the veda in which it occurs, and the upanishadic teaching is often presented in the context of a particular vedic hymn or ritual. In the vedAnta traditions, the upanishads are referred to as the *Sruti prasthAna*, i.e. revealed scripture, from which knowledge of brahman is obtained.

**The Principal upanishads:** The upanishads that have been commented upon by Sankara and other teachers have acquired extra significance as the principal or more or less "canonical" upanishads. These are:

- aitareya (Rg veda)
- bRhadAraNyaka (Sukla yajurveda)
- ISa (Sukla yajurveda)
- taittirIya (kRshNa yajurveda)
- kaTha (kRshNa yajurveda)
- chAndogya (sAma veda)
- kena (sAma veda)
- muNDaka (atharva veda)
- mANDUkya (atharva veda)
- praSna (atharva veda)

These ten are the most important and principal texts. Modern scholars believe that these also represent the oldest of the upanishadic texts. Others add the kaushItakI and SvetASvatara upanishads to the list of principal upanishads, and some add the maitrAyaNI too.

**Other upanishads:** A number of other upanishads are extant today. The Indian traditions regard the upanishads as Sruti, which is timeless, eternal, and *apaurusheya* (unauthored). Hence, finding dates of composition for the various upanishads is a meaningless non-issue to them. Some of the texts that are called upanishads may not be accepted by specific traditions. However, this is really a question of acknowledging the Sruti status of a given text, not one of finding a date of composition. Modern scholars attempt to fix periods of composition for all these texts. Needless to say, the date of composition of these texts, including those of the principal upanishads, is of no real concern to the vedAnta traditions.

It has become popular to classify the upanishads in terms of the subject matter they cover. Thus, we have a large number of upanishads dealing with general topics of vedAnta, in addition to those that teach yoga, and those that detail the rules of sam.nyAsa. The upanishads that tend to concentrate on one of the Great Deities of Hinduism are usually classified as Saiva, vaishNava and SAkta upanishads.

A list of 108 upanishads as found in the [muktikopanishad](#) is given in the table below. The yajurveda column has two rows under each heading - kRshNa yajurveda texts are in the upper row, and Sukla yajurveda texts in the lower one.

108 upanishads			
Rg veda (10)	yajur veda (51)	sAma veda (16)	atharva veda (31)
10 Principal upanishads			
aitareya	kaTha	kena chAndogya	praSna
	taittirIya		mANDUkya
	ISAvAsya		muNDaka
	bRhadAraNyaka		
24 sAmAnyA vedAnta upanishads			
Atmabodha kaushItakI mudgala	akshi	mahat maitrAyaNI vajrasUcI sAvitrI	AtmA sUrya
	ekAkshara		
	garbha		
	prANAgnihotra		
	SvetASvatara		
	SArIraka		
	Sukarahasya		
	skanda		
	sarvasAra		
	adhyAtma		
nirAlamba			

	paingala mAntrika muktika subAla		
17 sAm.nyAsa upanishads			
nirvANa	avAdhUta kaTharudra brahma jAbAla turIyAtIta paramaham.sa bhikshuka yAjnavalkya sAtyAyanI	AruNeya kuNDika maitreyI sam.nyAsa	nArada- -parivrAjaka parabrahma paramahamsa- -parivrAjaka
20 yoga upanishads			
nAdabindu	amRtanAda amRtabindu kshurika tejobindu dhyAnabindu brahmavidyA yogakuNDalinI yogatattva yogaSikhA varAha	jAbAladarSana yogacUDamaNi	pASupata- -brahma mahAvAkya SANDilya

	advayatAraka  triSikhi- -brAhmaNa  maNDala- -brAhmaNa  ham.sa		
14 vaishNava upanishads			
	kaliSAntaraNa  nArAyaNa  tArasAra	avyakta  vAsudeva	kRshNa  gAruDa  gopAlatApanI  tripAdvibhUti- mahAnArAyaNa  dattAtreya  nRsimhatApanI  rAmatApanI  rAmarahasya  hayagrIva
14 Saiva upanishads			
akshamAlA	kAlAgnirudra  kaivalya  dakshiNAmUrti  pancabrahma  rudrahRdaya  -	jAbAlI  rudrAkshajAbAla	atharvaSikhA  atharvaSira  gaNapati  bRhajjAbAla  bhasmajAbAla  Sarabha
9 Sakta upanishads			
tripurA	sarasvatIrahasya	-	annapUrNA



bahvRcA		tripurAtApanI
saubhAgya- -lakshmi	-	devI
		bhAvanA
		sItA

**Comments:** The classification of the upanishads on the basis of their subject matter seems reasonable, and other than the 10 principal ones, most of the upanishads quoted by the earliest commentators fall under the sAmAnyA vedAnta category. However, some upanishads could possibly be classified under more than one heading. For example, varAha and pASupatabrahma upanishads are classified as yoga upanishads and not as vaishNava and Saiva upanishads respectively. Similarly, gaNapati upanishad is included as a Saiva upanishad, while skanda upanishad is not. Also, hamsa upanishad is called a yoga upanishad and not a sam.nyAsa upanishad, whereas paramahamsa is included as a sam.nyAsa upanishad. Similarly, the mahAvAkya upanishad and the brahmavidyA upanishad might also justifiably be included under the sam.nyAsa upanishads.

In any case, there seems to be a large overlap in subject matter between the "yoga" upanishads and the "sam.nyAsa" upanishads, pointing to the close relationship between yoga practice and sam.nyAsa as an institution. This also raises the possibility that the traditional association of yoga with sAm.khya in terms of the six darSanas may be slightly misleading. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the most important texts on the yoga system are by teachers of advaita vedAnta, from Sankara downwards, although all these commentators explain yoga more or less in sAm.khyan terms. Another interesting observation in this connection is that advaita vedAntins have completely internalized yoga practice as an aid to meditation and to realize the non-dual brahman.

The bulk of the vaishNava (9 out of 14), Saiva (6 out of 14) and SAkta (5 out of 9) upanishads are assigned to the atharva veda. However, it should be noted that the other three vedas also have a significant share of the "late" upanishad texts. Three SAkta upanishads are from the Rg veda, while there are no vaishNava upanishads and only one Saiva upanishad assigned to the Rg veda. Also, there are no Saiva or SAkta upanishads assigned to the Sukla yajurveda, but a substantial number of Saiva (5 out of 14) upanishads are from the kRshNa yajus. The SAkta upanishads are grouped together, although some teach worship of sarasvatI, lakshmi or pArvatI, and others describe SrIcakra upAsanA, where Sakti is identified with brahman Itself, rather than being the Sakti of one of brahmA, vishNu or Siva. Since the upanishads are associated with individual SakhAs within each veda, it might be interesting to investigate the distribution of these upanishads further, and correlate them with the distribution of the vaidika SakhAs among today's communities of vaishNavas, Saivas and SAKtas.

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[Other web-sites on the upanishads](#)



# PURVA MIMAM.SA, ADVAITA AND OTHER SCHOOLS OF

## VEDANTA



[Transliteration Key](#)

The mImAm.sA (literally, enquiry) schools admit of *Sruti* (that which is heard, i.e. revelation) as a pramANa. Usually, the word mImAm.sA refers exclusively to the pUrva mImAm.sA school. The utara mImAm.sA school is more popularly known as vedAnta. A wide variety of texts, collectively called *smRti* (that which is remembered), is taken as a lower authority that is valid when it does not conflict with *Sruti*. Other sources of knowledge accepted by both pUrva mImAm.sA and vedAnta are: *pratyaksha* (sensory perception), *upamAna* (analogy), *anumAna* (inference), *arthApatti* (postulation) and *anupalabdhi/abhAva* (non-cognition/absence). The first three are borrowed from the nyAya-vaiSeshika schools, but arthApatti and anupalabdhi are unique to the bhATTa school of mImAm.sA thought. The mImAm.sA school of prabhAkara, called guru-mata, does not accept abhAva as an independent pramANa. Above all these, the veda stands as the supreme source of knowledge. The primacy concern of mImAm.sA is textual exegesis, in addition to being a school of philosophy. Theology and religion are inseparable from philosophy in the mImAm.sA schools. However, both pUrva and utara mImAm.sA schools maintain that *Sruti* exists only to reveal that which cannot be known otherwise. Moreover, *Sruti* cannot deny a fact that is amenable to ordinary perception, e.g. no amount of repetition by the vedas that fire is cold will make fire cold. Thus, if there occurs a statement in *Sruti* that goes contrary to perception, it requires interpretation in a metaphorical or allegorical sense. Hence, there is a place for logical thinking based on perception and inference in these schools.

pUrva mImAm.sA interprets the vedas mainly as a set of injunctions (*vidhi*), with adjoining recital (*mantra*) and commentary (*arthavAda*) portions. Thus, a statement, "he who is desirous of heaven should perform the jyotishToma rite" is a *vidhi*, an injunction, and the rite itself is to be performed with the relevant mantras. The knowledge conveyed by this statement is not known by any other means, and its purpose is to impel the listener to action. According to pUrva mImAm.sA, this heaven is the highest salvation that is available to human beings, and thus the vedas are the sources of knowledge about both *dharma* and *moksha*. The upanishads and brAhmaNas which relate to the said jyotishToma rite are considered to be the arthavAda, the explanatory commentary. The knowledge conveyed by the upanishads is also not known by any other means, but the upanishads are considered to be subordinate to the statements which impel man to action. Along with injunctions, there are also *pratishedhas*, statements which prohibit certain actions. The tradition of such textual exegesis codified in the *mImAm.sA sUtras*

of **jaimini**, with commentaries by **Sabara**, and sub-commentaries by **kumArila bhaTTa** and **prabhAkara**. The mImAm.sA that is taught in traditional vaidika pAthas in India today is based mainly upon the SABara bhAshya and kumArila's vArttikas. This school is called bhATTa mImAm.sA; the rival school called guru mata, following prabhAkara's interpretation, is mostly extinct today.

uttara mImAm.sA, also called vedAnta, does not consider the upanishads and brAhmaNas as arthavAda subservient to vidhis. Instead, they are seen to be sources of brahman knowledge, addressed solely to those who seek *moksha*. The rituals enjoined in the vedas are applicable to the realm of *dharmā*, but the one who seeks liberation does not merely desire a place in heaven; he is in search of ultimate Reality itself. The upanishads are viewed as those portions of the Sruti that address philosophical questions about Reality, here called brahman. This tradition of exegesis follows the *brahmasUtras* of bAdarAyaNa. Within vedAnta, there is considerable difference of opinion on whether the upanishads enjoin anything at all. The non-advaita schools consider some of the statements in the upanishads to be injunctions. The most famous example is *AtmA vA are drashTavya: Srotavya: mantavya: nididhyAsitavya:.* Most, if not all, non-advaita schools would take this to be an injunction. In contrast, the advaitin approach to this statement is to treat it as advice to the mumukshu, not as an injunction. This is because the AtmA is an accomplished fact; it is not a result of any action and therefore meditation on the innermost AtmA cannot be enjoined. In this respect, knowing the Atman contrasts with the heaven which is attained as a result of the performance of the jyotishToma sacrifice. According to advaita vedAnta, the veda addresses itself to two kinds of audiences - the ordinary ones who desire the transitory heaven and other pleasures obtained as a result of ritual sacrifices, and the more advanced seeker who seeks to know brahman. Thus, the pUrva mImAm.sA, with its emphasis on the karma kANDa of the vedas, is meant for the first audience, to help lead its followers along the way. However, the vedAnta, with its emphasis on the jnAna kANDa, is meant for those who wish to go beyond such transient pleasures.

As a mImAm.sA, vedAnta has a function of textual exegesis, with its uniquely Indian views on the origin, relevance and scope of revelation. In itself, any school of vedAnta can be considered to be a philosophy and also as a religion, there being no distinct line that can be drawn between the two, at least in the Indian context. vedAnta literally means "the end of the vedas." This can be interpreted in more ways than one. From the textual point of view, the [upanishads](#), the source books of the vedAnta, are considered to be the end of the vedas. From a philosophical point of view, vedAnta is the fruit or the goal of all the vedas. The philosophical interpretation is more preferable in the tradition. This is because the vedic texts are considered to be eternal, revealed scripture, so that they have no definable chronological beginning or end. advaita vedAnta is the oldest living school of vedAnta. It is also generally considered to be the premier school of vedAnta, and the word vedAnta is used synonymously with advaita in most literature.

vedAnta bases itself mainly upon three sets of texts, called *prasthAna trayI*. These are

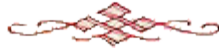
the upanishads (*Sruti prasthAna*), the bhagavad gItA (*smRti prasthAna*) and the brahmasUtras of bAdarAyaNa (*nyAya prasthAna*). A working definition for a Hindu tradition to be called vedAnta is that it should have definitive commentarial texts on the three *prasthAnas*. Consequently, the following brief description overlooks important traditions like those of Kashmir Saivism and southern Saiva siddhAnta.

An essential identity between Atman and brahman is upheld in *advaita* vedAnta. The personality of SankarAcArya and the force of advaita teaching is so strong that most post-Sankaran schools of vedAnta consciously define their doctrines against advaita thought. A number of [pre-Sankaran](#) vedAntins seem to have been proponents of *bhedAbheda* (bheda+abheda, or identity *in* difference). The earliest post-Sankaran school of vedAnta is also one of *bhedAbheda*. This is seen from the commentaries of bhAskarAcArya, which are still available, although the number of followers of this school is quite small. In the 14th century, SrIpati paNDita, a commentator from the vIraSaiva tradition, also identifies himself as a bhedAbhedavAdin. However, in general, the vIraSaiva school does not pay much attention to vedAntic questions. Some early advaita vedAnta influence on the monistic schools of [Kashmir Saivism](#) is also postulated. However, these schools base themselves upon an independent set of texts, namely the *Saiva Agamas*, and do not consider themselves to be vedAntic in origin.

A body-soul relationship between Atman and brahman is upheld in the school known as *viSishTAdvaita*. Here, the highest brahman is considered as a "person" with a body consisting of souls and matter. Theistic devotion to this highest brahman is held to be the sole means to final moksha. The *viSishTAdvaita* schools split on the question of identifying the highest brahman with Siva or vishNu, the Great Gods of Hinduism. The school of SrIkAnTha regards Siva to be the highest brahman, and teaches a variety of *viSishTAdvaita*. However, [appayya dIkshita](#) reinterpreted SrIkAnTha's thought in terms of advaita vedAnta, and consequently, this school has come to be known as *SivAdvaita*. Thus, only the vedAnta schools associated with vaishNava religion have maintained an identity distinct from advaita vedAnta.

Most people understand the word *viSishTAdvaita* to refer to the [SrI vaishNava](#) school of rAmAnujAcArya, which considers the highest brahman to be vishNu as SrImannArAyaNa, and continues to have a distinct identity in southern India, with major centers at Srirangam and Kancipuram. There is remarkable similarity between the teachings of rAmAnuja and SrIkAnTha, except that while the former insists upon the supremacy of nArAyaNa, the latter insists upon that of paramaSiva. Many northern bhakti schools trace their thought to rAmAnuja's tradition, through the person of rAmAnanda, a SrI vaishNava monk, who travelled extensively in the north and had many disciples. These vaishNava monks also belong to the tradition of *tridaNDI sam.nyAsa*, as compared to the *ekadaNDI sam.nyAsa* tradition of the [daSanAmI](#) monks. The *tridaNDI* ascetics carry a staff that consists of three sticks tied together, symbolizing the unity of three separate entities (God, individual soul and matter). The *ekadaNDI* monks carry a single stick, symbolizing the essential identity of brahman and Atman.

Complete difference and dualism is taught in the *dvaita* school of [AnandatIrtha](#) (also known as pUrNaprajna). This is a vaishNava tradition, centered at Udupi in Karnataka. AnandatIrtha was the disciple of an advaita daSanAmI monk named acyutapreksha Irtha, but he completely rejected advaita teaching. Because of this historical legacy, monks of the dvaita tradition continue to use daSanAmI suffixes, especially Irtha, and are *ekadaNDI sam.nyAsins*, although they would not interpret their single staff as a symbol of brahman-Atman identity. The gauDiya vaishNavas claim to be affiliated to the dvaita tradition, but their teaching of *acintya bhedAbheda* is quite different philosophically. They have also affiliated themselves with the *tridaNDI sam.nyAsa* tradition in recent times. And there is the devotional vaishNava school of vallabhAcArya, which is known as [pushTi-mArga](#), and as *SuddhAdvaita*. Despite this name, this school should not be confused with advaita vedAnta. The gauDiya vaishNavas have substantial following in Bengal, and the vallabha school in Gujarat. nimbArka, another vaishNava teacher, taught *dvaitAdvaita*, which is similar to *bhedAbheda*. This is a vaishNava school that has a small following in the plains of the Yamuna river.



# ADVAITA VEDĀNTA



[Transliteration Key](#)

## Introduction -

The advaita philosophy is not easy to explain briefly, and it is not my intention to repeat in a www home page what takes whole volumes for accomplished experts. I will content myself with providing a brief synopsis of the various aspects of advaita vedĀnta.

A very important assumption in all vedĀnta is that man suffers from bondage in the course of his life in this world. This is said to be *sam.sAra*, which involves being caught in an endless cycle of births and deaths. The quest therefore is to seek a way out of this bondage, to break the cycle of rebirths and attain moksha or liberation. The most important issues in vedĀnta have to be understood with respect to what constitutes bondage and what constitutes liberation. The advaita school is of the view that *jñāna* (knowledge) of man's true nature is liberation. Bondage arises from ignorance (*avidyā*) of man's true nature, and therefore removal of ignorance roots out this bondage. Liberation is therefore nothing more or nothing less than man knowing his true nature. This true nature is his innermost essence, the Atman, which is nothing other than brahman. He who knows this, not merely as bookish knowledge, but through his own Experience, is liberated even when living. Such a man is a *jīvanmukta*, and he does not return to the cycle of rebirths.

## brahman -

It may be noticed that at first glance, advaita's solution to the problem of man's liberation does not seem to involve God as a Creator or a Savior at all. If all that is required is to know one's own true nature, what role does God have to play in this universe? advaita's answer to this issue is buried in the advaitic conception of brahman. One is the view of the *brahmasūtra* that brahman is at once both the instrumental and the material cause of the universe. The *brahmasūtra* holds such a view because there is nothing that can be said to exist independent of brahman. Is brahman then just a name for a universal set - the superset of all things in this universe? Not so, because brahman has been described as beyond all change, whereas the perceived universe is full of change. Still, this universe is said to have brahman as the only cause. At the same time, to understand brahman truly is to know It to be devoid of parts and diversity, and beyond all causality/action. Such a conception of brahman derives from the [upanishads](#), which say *sarvam khalvidam brahma* - all this is indeed nothing but brahman - on the one hand, and *neha nAnAsti kincana* - there is no diversity here - on the other. Thus, the conception of brahman as a Creator in advaita is a unique one, and directly relates to the advaita views on causality.

Causality: *pariNāma* and *vivarta* -

There are different [theories of causality](#) described by advaita vedAntins, but they are all agreed that brahman is the sole cause of the universe, i.e both the instrumental and the material cause of the universe. The axiom that the One brahman is the cause of the many-fold universe is the foundation on which the entire system of advaita vedAnta is based, and numerous efforts have been made over the centuries, to address [logical problems](#) arising out of it. This brahman is also held to be eternal and changeless. It is easy to understand brahman as the instrumental cause of the universe. This view is not very different from the traditional perspective shared by almost all religions - some creator is usually credited with having created this universe. This creator is the instrumental cause of the universe. What differentiates the [standard vedAnta position](#) from such general theistic views is that brahman is simultaneously also the material cause of the universe. In other words, creation is never *ex nihilo*, but proceeds out of brahman Itself, although brahman remains unchanged.

Common-sense views of material causality always involve some kind of change. Thus, for example, milk is said to be the material cause of curds. However, in the process of curdling milk, the milk cannot be recovered. All we have at the end is the curds, the milk being irretrievably lost. This kind of causality involving change is called *pariNAMA*. There is another kind of material causality. For example, gold is the material cause of an ornament made out of gold. In the process of making the ornament, the metal does not change into something else. It is only drawn into another form, from a lump to an ornament; the gold remains gold. This kind of causality is called *vivarta*, where the material cause itself does not change into something else. The chAndogya upanishad makes very telling use of this kind of causality in its illustrations of how "Being" alone is the original cause (*sadeva saumya idam agra AsIt, ekameva advitIyam*), and how all perceived change is only in the realm of name and form, dependent on language (*vAcArambhaNam vikAro nAmadheyam*). The reality of gold is quite independent of what shape it is in.

Although SankarAcArya makes use of both kinds of causality (*pariNAMA* and *vivarta*) in his analogies, he denies that brahman's role as the material cause of the universe involves any change in the essence that is brahman. In the logical extreme, both *pariNAMA* and *vivarta* views of causality are deficient, as they presume a separate reality of the effect, apart from that of the cause. Therefore, the most subtle arguments in advaita vedAnta turn upon the [ajAti vAda](#) notion - that there is no real creation. *vivarta* and *pariNAMA* are both seen as convenient ways of describing causality, only if some provisional reality is conceded for the notion of creation. Those who follow the [dRshTi-sRshTi vAda](#) also maintain that brahman is beyond all causality. However, most [post-Sankaran authors](#), who teach in accordance with what is called the [sRshTi-dRshTi vAda](#), opt for a *vivarta* notion of causality, as far as accounting for all creation is concerned. It should be remembered that the conception of brahman as both the material and instrumental cause of the universe implies a very special kind of causality, one that is not similar to any other, and that cannot therefore be captured completely by any



analogy. It is as if brahman has acted upon itself in order to produce this universe, that is full of change. Yet, the [upanishads](#) abound with passages denying that any change is possible in brahman, and indeed SankarAcArya denies that brahman really acts. brahman is also described as devoid of all attributes, along with passages that glorify brahman as ISvara, the Lord of this universe, with infinite attributes.

### ***nirguNa* and *saguNa* brahman -**

To resolve such passages in the upanishads, advaita vedAnta maintains that really brahman is devoid of all attributes, and is therefore known as ***nirguNa***. brahman may be described as in the upanishads, as Truth (*satyam*), Knowledge (*jnAnam*), Infinite (*anantam*), or as Being (*sat*), Consciousness (*cit*), Bliss (*Ananda*), but none of these terms can be truly interpreted as attributes of brahman as a Super-person/God. Rather, it is because brahman exists, that this whole universe is possible. It is because brahman exists that man ascribes attributes to brahman. However, brahman's true nature cannot be captured in words, for all these attributes are ultimately just words. Hence, it is man's ignorance of Its true nature that postulates attributes to brahman, thereby describing It in ***saguNa*** terms (with attributes). This *saguNa* brahman is ISvara, the Lord, whose essential reality as brahman is not dependent on anything else, and does not change because of the production of this universe. Therefore, advaita holds that brahman's own nature (*svarUpa- lakshaNa*) is devoid of any attributes (*nirguNa*), while It is seen for the temporary purposes of explaining creation (*taTastha- lakshaNa*) to be ISvara, with attributes (*saguNa*).

So much for *saguNa* and *nirguNa* brahman. If brahman cannot be held to have suffered any change because of creation of the universe, then what is the status of this universe? Since the cause does not undergo any change in the process of producing the effect, it is held that the cause alone is Real. The universe only partakes in reality inasmuch as it is to be considered as dependent on brahman. Therefore the upanishads say, "*sarvam. khalvidam. brahma.*" If the universe is considered to be independent of brahman, then it has no real Reality, although the world of human perception can never reveal this truth. This is simply because brahman Itself is never an object of human perception. It is this characteristic of dualistic knowledge, derived from perception alone, that prompts the advaitin to call it *mithyAjnAna* (false knowledge).

### ***avidyA* and *mAyA* -**

Why does human perception fail to see brahman directly? SankarAcArya attributes it sometimes to *avidyA* (ignorance) and sometimes to *mAyA* (the power to deceive). As the bRhAdAraNyaka upanishad puts it, "*vijnAtAram. are kena vijAnIyAt?*" - How is the Knower Itself to be known? It also stands to reason, therefore, that any effort at characterizing brahman falls far short of brahman. No words reach brahman; how can mere verbal descriptions claim to describe It? advaita now turns to the ancient technique of *adhyAropa-apavAda* (sublation of superimposition) to explain this. Thus, although brahman is called the instrumental and material cause of the universe, advaita tells us

that this is only a preliminary view of brahman, motivated by a need to explain creation of the universe. In order to understand brahman, one has to go beyond this preliminary view, and understand brahman in Itself, not necessarily in relation to the universe. Then it is understood that the whole universe is only superimposed on the underlying Reality that is brahman. To really know brahman, one needs to sublimate this superimposition, and look at the substratum (*adhishThAna*) that is brahman. As for the exact nature of *avidyA* and *mAyA*, [later authors](#) seem divided into two major schools of thought, namely the [bhAmatI](#) and the [vivaraNa](#) schools.

**brahman = Atman -**

What then of the human self, the jIva? It is here that advaita comes up with the most radical answer, one that is unacceptable to all other schools of vedAnta. According to advaita, what is called the universe is in reality not other than brahman. Similarly, what is called the jIva is in reality, the Atman, which is also nothing other than brahman Itself. The real jIva is the Atman, which is unchanging, ever free, and identical with brahman. This is said on the basis of upanishadic passages where the Atman is explicitly equated with brahman. This equation of Atman with brahman is also explained by means of *adhyAropa-apavAda*. By sublating the superimposition of human shortcomings and attributes on the Atman, the pure Atman, the substratum, shines forth as brahman Itself. The manifold universe and the individual self, which considers itself bound, are both superimposed upon that Transcendental Reality which is brahman. Once the superimposition is understood for what it is, the individual is no more an individual, the universe is no more the universe - all is brahman.

This doctrine of advaita should not be misinterpreted to mean that the human self is in and of itself God, without any qualification whatsoever. SankarAcArya most emphatically asserts that such is not his intention. On the other hand, he is at great pains to point out that one who is desirous of moksha needs to overcome his human shortcomings in order to achieve full liberation. Sankara prescribes rigorous prerequisite qualities for the person who is to study vedAnta. These form the practical aspect of the effort to rise above and sublimate the characteristics of the human jIva, in order to understand the Atman/brahman. The non-dual reality of the Atman is revealed to the intense seeker, as an experience that defies words. One might call it a mystic experience of brahman, in which to know brahman is to be brahman. Thus, rather than being atheistic or non-theistic, advaita vedAnta is meta-theistic: it points to the basic underlying Reality of all, including what humans call God, what humans call the universe, and what humans call human. This Reality is the unchangeable brahman.

***tattvamasi*** -

At this juncture, it is instructive to look at the advaitin interpretation of the chAndogya statement *tattvamasi*, following SankarAcArya. This is one of the four statements that have become well-known as the upanishadic mahAvAkyas, which equate Atman with brahman. The four most important mahAvAkyas (one from each veda) are:

अयमात्मा ब्रह्म - "ayamAtmA brahma" (muNDaka)

तत्त्वमसि - "tattvamasi" (chAndogya)

अहं ब्रह्मास्मि - "aham brahmAsmi" (bRhadAraNyaka)

प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म - "prajnAnam brahma" (aitareya)

Sankara explains *tattvamasi* as follows. *tat* is a common designation for brahman in the upanishads, while *tvam* (thou) addresses the student. The sentence states an equation of two seemingly different entities *tat* - that, and *tvam* - thou, by means of the verb *asi* - are. In general, brahman (*tat*) is commonly understood as ISvara (saguNa brahman), with an infinity of attributes, including the power of creation. *tvam* is the individual who is bound, who is embodied, and who is in need of liberation. The difference between *tvam* and *tat* seems to be a matter of common knowledge for all individuals. What is the reason for the upanishad to teach an identity then? An identity cannot be stipulated, even in infallible Sruti, if there is a real difference. Keeping in mind that Sruti is infallible, advaita therefore concludes that really there is no ultimate difference between *tat* and *tvam*.

The identity expressed in a statement like *tattvamasi* is therefore held to be Real, and its realization constitutes the height of knowledge (*jnAna*). Direct experience of this *jnAna* is in fact moksha. It also follows that since this identity is not perceived normally, difference arises out of *avidyA*, ignorance of the true nature of Reality. Since Sruti is superior to perception, this identity is indeed the supreme truth, all difference being in the realm of relative perception. If non-dualism is the true nature of Reality, why is this difference perceived in the first place? Given advaita's basis on the non-dualistic scriptures, the perception of difference remains, in the final analysis, inexplicable. This is labeled "*anirvAcya/anirvacanIya* " in advaita - something that can never be fully understood by the human mind. Since perception of duality presupposes *avidyA*, no amount of logical analysis, itself based on this duality, will satisfactorily explain *avidyA*. Hence, SankarAcArya is not much interested in explicating *avidyA*, except to acknowledge its presence in all human activity, and in trying to overcome it to understand brahman.

### ***vyavahAra* and *paramArtha* -**

This exegesis of scripture leads to the well-known advaitic doctrine of two levels of understanding: *vyAvahArika satya* (phenomenal or relative reality or just "reality", where duality is seen) and *pAramArthika satya* (transcendental reality, or "Reality", non-duality). One important upanishadic source for advaita vedAnta's theory of two levels of truth is the analysis of the Atman as "*neti, neti*" - not this, not this. This is from the bRhadAraNyaka upanishad. This upanishad also describes the highest state of the Atman in purely non-dualistic terms - "*yatra tvasya sarvam AtmaivAbhUt, tatra kena kam paSyet? ..... vijnAtAram. are kena vijAnIyAt?*" - Where the Atman alone has become all this, how is one to see another? ..... How is the Knower to be Known? Most advaitins point to the quotation from the bRhadAraNyaka that immediately precedes

this: "*yatra tu dvaitamiva bhavati, ...*" - where there is duality, as it were, ... - as the scriptural basis for saying that perception of duality is an appearance only, "as it were" and not the supreme Reality. This rejection of all characterization as partial at best, and ultimately untrue, means that the Atman is beyond all duality, and all attempts to describe It fail, because language itself presupposes duality. This *via negativa* approach is very much favored in advaita vedAnta. This emphasis on identifying the Atman with brahman by means of sublating the commonly understood characteristics of each term, to affirm the real nature of the Atman, is central to advaita vedAnta.

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**Note:** The **standard vedAntic position** is that brahman is both the material and the instrumental cause of the universe. This is a notion shared by advaita, viSishTAdvaita and the various bheda schools of vedAnta. The dvaita school denies that brahman can be the material cause of the universe, and (in my opinion) goes against the *brahmasUtras* in the process.

● **References:**

There is a large body of literature on advaita vedAnta. Check the [bibliography page](#) for a list of references.



## CREATION THEORIES IN ADVAITA VEDANTA



[Transliteration Key](#)

There are three main ways of understanding creation in the advaita tradition - namely, *ajAti vAda* (creation is not an absolute, real event), *sRshTi-dRshTi vAda* (what has been created is perceived) and *dRshTi-sRshTi vAda* (perception is simultaneous with creation). The *ajAti vAda* view is held in the *pAramArthika* sense, while the other two views are held in the *vyAvahArika* sense. As in most issues in advaita philosophy, the writings of Sankara themselves draw upon all these views, while later writers develop upon one or the other view. The *ajAti vAda* is mainly elaborated by [gauDapAda](#), Sankara's paramaguru. However, please remember that the advaita tradition is one of oral teaching, and therefore the description that follows is not exhaustive. A given teacher may use one or more of these *vAdas*, depending upon his own views, the student's ability, and other factors.

### *sRshTi-dRshTi vAda* :-

Whether of the [bhAmatI](#) or of the [vivaraNa](#) school of post-Sankaran advaita, most authors start off assuming the universe. For the beginning student, this makes sense, because everybody starts off by observing a universe distinct from "oneself", and believing that this observed universe has a distinct reality apart from "oneself". So long as this "oneself" is identified by the observer, not with the Atman, but with anAtman, advaitins would say that there is a difference between the observed ("the universe" which, by the way, is wrongly perceived) and the observer (the "oneself" which is wrongly identified). At this stage, there is still ignorance about the true nature of external things and oneself. Taking this ignorance into account, and referring to the *IkshaNa-Sruti* (*tadaikshata bahusyAm prajAyeya* - this sentence occurs almost every time there is talk of creation in the upanishads, as in the *sad-vidyA* section of the *chAndogya*), the universe is held to be created by brahman in His capacity as ISvara. This is the *sRshTi-dRshTi vAda*, i.e. the universe that is seen has been created by ISvara. *sRshTi* (creation) is therefore prior to *dRshTi* (perception). In other words, advaita vedAnta can accept the view that a thing has to exist, in order for it to be perceived. Note that this view also entails what is known as *aneka-jIva vAda* - the view that there are multiple *jIvas*, corresponding to numerous sentient individuals in the universe.

However, it is pointed out that to even talk of creation, one has to assume *avidyA*, and one has to admit of *mAyA*, as the power of ISvara. Under this view, *mAyA* is accorded a measure of reality with respect to the observed universe, and is similar in many respects to the notion of *prakRti* in *sAm.khya*. Still, it is denied that this *mAyA* has an independent existence or reality of its own. It is made absolutely dependent on brahman,

which is the sole reality. It is this position that differentiates advaita vedAnta from the dualistic sAm.khya, although some authors of the bhAmatI school may write in such a way as to make this distinction very fuzzy indeed. Inasmuch as the only independent cause is brahman as ISvara, and so far as it is held that the mAyA disappears when brahman is truly known, this view is still non-dual in its teaching. This notion of brahman as ISvara, with attributes, who appears to be different from the creation, is therefore described as the "*taTastha-lakshaNa*" - a temporary description for the purposes of explaining creation to those who seek one. This temporary description does not mean that non-duality is compromised. The *sRshTi-dRshTi* view may help the layman to understand the fact that throughout the ages, advaitins have by and large been very devoutly religious people, who worship their chosen deity. They do not think that this affects non-duality in any way. So much for *vyavahAra*.

### ***AjAti vAda :-***

The notion that mAyA has no reality in itself, and that brahman is the only real, allows the *sRshTi-dRshTi vAdin* to "graduate", so to speak, to *ajAtivAda*, the view that no creation really occurred ever. Although one initially starts looking for brahman as the ontological basis of the perceived universe, advaita also recognizes that this search for origins is ultimately futile, as far as moksha is concerned. It is pointed out that moksha means that the Atman is fully known as brahman Itself. Therefore, understand the Atman first, theories about how this creation came about can wait. Until now, the questioner has been concerned mainly with explaining the external world, which (s)he knows only through the operation of the senses. The identity propounded by the upanishads (between the Atman and brahman) opens up an even more fascinating inner world that is not seen by the eye, not heard by the ear and not felt by touch. It is this inner search that allows the sAdhaka to acquire the jnAna to deny mAyA any reality whatsoever. At this stage, brahman, which was previously understood to be with attributes, is understood in its essence to be really *nirguNa*. This essential nature of brahman is described as "*svarUpa-lakshaNa*" - a description that captures the real nature of brahman. When brahman is apprehended as the *nirguNa*, without any attributes, mAyA completely disappears. The universe too, consequently has to disappear. This is the most difficult thing for anybody to understand and accept, because the senses constantly seem to remind one of the presence of the universe. But then, the unitary understanding of the Atman as identical to brahman occurs only at the turIya (the fourth) state, not in the jAgrat (waking), svapna (dream) and sushupti (deep sleep) states. As the mANDUkya upanishad reminds us, the turIya is *adRshTam* (unseeable), *avyavahAryam* (non-relational), *agrAhyam* (ungraspable), *alakshaNam* (without any attributes), *acintyam* (unthinkable), *avyapadeSyam* (cannot be indicated as an object), *ekAtma-pratyaya-sAram* (the essence of cognition of the One Atman), *prapancopaSamam* (that

into which the entire universe is resolved), *SAntam* (peaceful), *Sivam* (auspicious), *advaitam* (non-dual).

As far as creation theories are concerned, the most important adjectives in the mANDUkya's list, in my opinion, are *prapancopaSamam* - that into which the world is resolved, and *ekAtma-pratyaya-sAram* - the essence of cognition of the One Atman. These words indicate that in the turIya state, the mistaken identification of the Atman with anAtman has ceased, and there is no more external world perceived as separate from oneself. The "oneself" that was previously talked about doesn't exist anymore, and the world external to this "oneself" also does not exist anymore. Only the One Atman remains. It is only at this stage that it makes sense to talk of *ajAti*. The word *prapancopaSamam* indicates that the world-in-itself has no existence. It is as if this world that was previously seen as external to "oneself", along with the "oneself" that was previously mistakenly identified with things other than the Atman, is now resolved into the One Atman, the one and only Reality.

The same idea is mentioned in the bRhadAraNyaka - *yatra tvasya sarvam AtmaivAbhUt, tatra kena kam paSyet?* etc. leading to *vijnAtAram are kena vijAnIyAt?* In the state of non-duality, the One Atman itself is the whole world; there is nothing other than this Atman, so talk of a world external to this Atman does not even arise. The questions posed by the bRhadAraNyaka indicate that there are no senses of sight, smell, touch etc. that can operate at this state. Hence the question, *vijnAtAram are kena vijAnIyAt?* - how is the knower to be known? i.e. not through the senses. The knower knows itself, immediately, and there is no distinction between the knower, the means of knowledge and the object of knowledge. I will restrict the urge to indulge in poetic fancy about the ineffable nature of this *vijnAtA*, and the experience that defies words. Reverting to our concern about creation, we can say this much. As the question of creation does not even arise when the identity of Atman with brahman is known, it follows that nothing either comes into being nor goes out of being - it is always self-existent. This is *ajAtivAda*. The Atman is eternal, unborn and undying, admitting of no divisions. As the creation (*prapanca*) has been resolved (*upaSamam*) into this One Atman Itself, *prapanca* can be described as not created. This is the *paramArtha*. Returning to *vyavahAra*, one comes back to the jAgrat, svapna and sushupti states, but the knowledge gained in the turIya state remains, and the preliminary *sRshTi-dRshTi* view loses much of its significance.

Thus, traditional advaita vedAntins generally handle creation by provisionally explaining it in terms of *sRshTi-dRshTi vAda*, followed by a subsequent *ajAti vAda* argument, which denies that creation is an event that took place at some given point of time in the past. This approach follows the *adhyAropa-apavAda* method (sublation of superimposition), and is closely tied to the *vyavahAra* and *paramArtha* ways of understanding reality. So far as the *paramArtha* is held to be the only Real, *ajAti* is upheld. *sRshTi-dRshTi* is accepted only in the *vyAvahAric* sense, and needs to be transcended along with the rest of *vyavahAra*, for the sake of moksha.

This description of creation theories in advaita holds true for those authors who want to approach the paramArtha through the vyavahAra, i.e. from *sRshTi-dRshTi* to *ajAti*. There are other authors like SrIharsha, citsukha and sukhaparakASa, who care not a whit for vyavahAra, and do not feel the need to even talk about creation. These authors are masters of dialectic, much like nAgArjuna, and are interested in demolishing the logical premises of any question or definition that presupposes duality. As an aside, these authors are quite aware that their method is very close to the madhyamaka approach, but they categorically assert brahman as the only absolute, and still find fault with nAgArjuna for not asserting the existence of one absolute.

### ***dRshTi-sRshTi vAda* :-**

This brings me to the third view, namely *dRshTi-sRshTi vAda* - the view that cognition and creation are simultaneous. It is generally assumed that this view was first propounded by [prakASAnanda sarasvatI](#) (ca. 16th century CE) - in his **vedAnta-siddhAnta-muktAvallI**. This author also wrote texts on SrIvidyA, such as **tArAbhaktitarangiNI**. It is generally assumed that this view is an entirely new position, unknown to earlier authors in the advaita tradition. However, it should be pointed out that the [gauDapAdIya kArika](#) also teaches a very similar view in its arguments leading up to *ajAti vAda*. This view comes close to many schools of subjective idealism and to the buddhist *vijnAnavAda*. It also seems to throw up the most interesting logical paradoxes that are familiar to those interested in interpretations of quantum mechanics, e.g. the act of observation itself causing a particular collapse of a wave function, thus creating its outcome in some sense, and the absolute necessity of the observer in any description of an event.

Within traditional vedAnta discourse, numerous objections can be raised against this view. If ISvara exists in the vyAvahAric sense, then is he the creator of the universe or not? If yes, *dRshTi-sRshTi vAda* is contradicted, for it holds that the jIva creates simultaneously with cognition. This means there are multiple creators, in addition to ISvara. If it is said that the jIva and ISvara are both brahman and the created entity is also brahman (since everything is brahman), so that the creation by a jIva does not contradict ISvara's creatorship, the objection to this would be that such a view ends up partitioning brahman into several different real entities, but brahman cannot be so divided. If ISvara is said not to be the creator, then this view contradicts Sruti. Besides, what is the practical use, to the spiritual aspirant, of admitting such an ISvara?

In answer to all these objections, it should be emphasized that the *dRshTi-sRshTi* view is also closely allied to what is known as the *eka-jIva vAda*, and cannot be viewed independently of it. The *eka-jIva vAda* holds that, ultimately speaking, there is only one jIva, which is identical with brahman. If this is understood, all the above objections simply vanish. There is no question of multiple creators, as there is only the one jIva,



identical with brahman. The *dRshTi-sRshTi vAdin* also does not "really" partition brahman into several different entities. On the contrary, it is the above mentioned objector who actually assumes that brahman can be so partitioned. As for the practical use to the spiritual aspirant, the *dRshTi-sRshTi* view is freely admitted to be useful only for the advanced *sAdhaka* who does not cling to a view of multiple, real jIvas. Such an aspirant also does not define his ISvara with respect to the creation, and is, in fact, better suited to really understand what the Sruti means, when it says that brahman creates by mere seeing (*tad aikshata*).

I would like to end on a note of caution against reading too much into the names of these vAdas. The names are meant to capture the most significant thread of discussion in each vAda, but it is easy to be misled into an analysis of the respective positions that concentrates only on their names and forgets all the other allied arguments that are not specifically mentioned in the name. Each vAda touches upon every issue that is of concern to the advaita vedAntin, but in slightly different ways. Besides, a given advaita teacher may teach different aspirants differently, based on differing aptitudes. All vedAntins of non-advaita schools are necessarily *sRshTi-dRshTi vAdins* in their own way, but they can never be *dRshTi-sRshTi vAdins* or *ajAti vAdins*. An advaitin, on the other hand, may teach students according to either *dRshTi-sRshTi vAda* or *sRshTi-dRshTi vAda*, but all versions of these vAdas will return to the basic Atman = brahman equation. In the final analysis, as long as moksha remains the prime issue around which every discussion revolves, *ajAti vAda* always remains, and every advaitin returns to it, whatever other vAda he uses when talking of vyavahAra. Thus, no true advaitin will deny *ajAtivAda*, although he may rarely talk of it, and he probably will not actively teach it to anybody but the most advanced student.



## THE PROBLEM OF ONE VS. MANY



[Transliteration Key](#)

SankarAcArya, following the [upanishads](#), asserts that the sole cause of the universe is the One brahman that is really *nirguNa*. The problem with asserting One brahman that is without parts, changeless and eternal, as the only cause of the universe is this - the universe is normally perceived to be full of many separate parts which change all the time, and has little that is eternal in it. How is it that the changeless and non-relational brahman produces the variegated universe? This is related to the larger philosophical problem of change and continuity, which had historically played such a big role in Indian thinking that many buddhist schools had denied that an eternal entity like brahman could even exist. Moreover, in the buddhist schools, the notion of an Atman is itself an erroneous concept, because everything was defined to be momentary.

Among the brahminical schools, the nyAya and vaiSeshika schools handled the problem of change by postulating atoms (*aNus*) as the unit constituents of any entity. Transformation and change were explained by means of combinations of integral numbers of atoms (*dvayaNuka*, *trayaNuka* etc.), and the individual *Atman* was also supposed to be atomic in size and qualities. A creator God (*ISvara*) was arrived at by an inferential argument, on the premise that everything must have a cause of some sort, so that the cause of the universe is God. This inferred *ISvara* was then identified with the brahman of the vedas. The yoga and sAm.khya schools postulated ultimate reality to be a duality of *purusha* and *prakRti*. The *purusha* was said to be changeless and the one undergoing bondage and liberation owing to contact with or withdrawal from *prakRti*. All change was then described as the working of *prakRti*, which deluded the *purusha* into activity and thus into bondage (*bandha*). Liberation (*moksha*) for the *purusha* arose only when the *purusha* dissociated completely from the workings of *prakRti*. Meanwhile, the position of a creator God remained ambivalent in the sAm.khya system. Most classical sAm.khya authors denied the necessity of an *ISvara*, while some were willing to postulate *ISvara* as an eternally liberated *purusha*. The yoga system, as expounded in the *yoga-sUtras* of patanjali, accepted *ISvara* and made *ISvara-praNidhana* an essential aspect of yogic *sAdhana*.

The pUrva mImAm.sA system was concerned primarily with asserting the eternal value of the vedas, and interpreted everything in the vedas in the context of ritual action. Consequently, impelling the listener to action was asserted to be the over-riding purpose of the vedas. The fruit of the ritual action was also mentioned in the same vedas, and the highest fruit that was obtainable by the proper performance of ritual action was heaven. On this view, the individual Atman attained heaven by the performance of Vedic ritual, and returned to the cycle of rebirths otherwise. On the other hand, the *aupanishada* tradition which gave birth to the mature vedAnta systems asserted an eternal Atman forcefully. This Atman was also held to be beyond birth and death. Physical death only

meant that the Atman took another body. Moreover, the [upanishads](#) declare the Atman to be ultimately the same as the One brahman which is the sole cause of the universe.

The *upanishads* relate a higher vision that is mystic and that does not demand to be logically substantiated. The problem of the one brahman creating the diverse universe was handled by means of various analogies, as in the *chAndogya upanishad*. The nature of the Indian philosophical traditions, however, required every new teacher to not only relate his vision of reality, but also to substantiate it by logical arguments. The *naiyyAyikas*, the buddhists and the grammarians had developed methods of logical analysis, including inducto-deductive reasoning, evaluating the validity of cognitions with a consistent theory of language and meaning, and rigorous requirements of consistency and non-contradiction. Analogies did play an important part in the logical analysis, but the spirit of the times called for more intellectual speculation and rationalization. This was the prime motivation for *bAdarAyaNa's brahmasUtras*, which attempted to harmonize the many teachings of the *upanishads* into one consistent system. The *brahmasUtras* are therefore called the *nyAya-prasthAna* (not to be confused with the independent philosophical system of the *nyAya*).

The [gauDapAdIya kArikAs](#) and [Sankara's bhAshyas](#) follow in the same spirit. In establishing the [main tenets of advaita vedAnta](#), Sankara drew upon *mImAm.sA* theories of perception and language, and *sAm.khya* notions of the transformations of *prakRti*. He also gave a place for yogic practice in his system, and used *nyAya* methods of inferential reasoning wherever appropriate. This was coupled with a critique of the logical shortcomings of these systems and rejecting those tenets which were not in accordance with the thought of the *upanishads*. Thus, for example, he accepted *mImAm.sA* rules of exegesis, but pointed out that their applicability was limited largely to the *karma-kANDa*, the *upanishads* requiring different methods of interpretation. Similarly, he denied an independent existence to the *sAm.khya* *prakRti*, and in his analysis of the relation of the universe to brahman, made the equivalent *mAyA* completely dependent upon the reality of brahman. [maNDana miSra](#), Sankara's contemporary, also developed powerful arguments that denied ultimate reality to difference. Between Sankara and *maNDana*, *advaita vedAnta* became the most important school of *vedAnta*, and indeed of all Indian philosophical thought. However, after this time, the followers of rival schools started re-evaluating their positions, modifying their views and began posing new objections to *advaita*. The later teachers in the *advaita* tradition lived and worked in such a milieu.

Among the works of Sankara's immediate disciples (8th century CE), [toTaka's SrutisArasamuddhAraNa](#) did not attract sub-commentaries from later authors, while no texts attributed to [hastAmalaka](#) were widely known. [sureSvara's upanishad-bhAshya-vArttikAs](#) and the *naishkarmayasiddhi*, and [padmapAda's pancapAdikA](#) influenced the course of post-Sankaran *advaita vedAnta* significantly. Soon after their time, [vAcaspati miSra](#) (9th century CE), wrote his *bhAmatI* commentary on Sankara's *brahmasUtra bhAshya*, and [prakASatman](#) (10th century CE) wrote a *vivaraNa* to the *pancapAdikA*.

Later authors sometimes wrote independent treatises of their own, but more often chose an earlier text to comment upon, thus building up sets of commentaries and sub-commentaries, which make the philosophical views of the sub-schools clearer. These authors may be classified under four heads for the sake of convenience -

- those who closely followed sureSvara's line of thought (e.g. [sarvajnaAtman](#), [madhusUdana sarasvatI](#)),
- those who followed the *pancapAdika* and [prAkASAtman](#)'s *vivaraNa* commentary thereon (the *vivaraNa* school),
- those who followed [vAcaspati](#)'s line (the *bhAmatI* sub-school), and
- those who made independent critiques of difference and thus established non-duality (e.g. [SrIharsha](#) and [citsukha](#)).

Both the *bhAmatI* and *vivaraNa* lines base themselves upon differing interpretations of SankarAcArya's brahmasUtra bhAshya. Since the brahmasUtras continued to be the defining source for all vedAnta schools, the *bhAmatI* and *vivaraNa* schools attained the most prominence in the dialogue that developed between advaita and rival vedAnta schools on the one hand, and advaita vedAnta and non-vedAnta schools on the other.



# THE BHAMATI AND VIVARANA SCHOOLS



[Transliteration Key](#)

In his works, SankarAcArya takes a direct approach to the problem of human liberation, and declares that *moksha* consists in realizing the identity of Atman with the One brahman. This brahman is in fact, all that really IS, and there is no change or multiplicity in It. As for the question, how does the perception of multiplicity arise in the first place, Sankara points to *avidyA* and *mAyA*. He does not attempt to explicate *avidyA* too much, and tells the student not to worry about the logical status of this *avidyA*, except to recognize that it is responsible for desires (*kAma*) and action (*karma*) which lead to bondage (*bandha*). Therefore, getting rid of the *avidyA* leads to *moksha*, which is really not different from the *brahman* itself.

After his time, *avidyA* and *mAyA* became a tough problem for his followers. Sankara described *avidyA* as *anAdi* - beginningless. His approach was informed by the well considered notion that searching for the roots of *avidyA* was itself a manifestation of the very *avidyA* one was seeking to remove. However, in order to work out the logical implications of various advaitic doctrines, his followers had to pay greater attention to this issue. In course of time, two sub-schools, known as the bhAmatI and the vivaraNa schools emerged within advaita vedAnta. The bhAmatI school takes its name after [vAcaspati miSra](#)'s commentary on Sankara's *brahmasUtra-bhAshya*, while the vivaraNa school takes its name after [prakASAtman](#)'s commentary on padmapAda's *pancapAdika*, which is itself a commentary on Sankara's *brahmasUtra-bhashya*.

The most important commentaries and sub-commentaries that define the *bhAmatI* school are the following.

SankarAcArya - *brahmasUtra bhAshya*  
vAcaspati miSra - ***bhAmatI***  
amalAnanda - *kalpataru*  
appayya dlkshita - *parimala*  
lakshmiRsimha - *Abhoga*  
allAla sUrI - *bhAmatI tilaka*  
SrIranganAtha - *bhAmatI vyAkhyA*

There are a large number of texts in the *vivaraNa* school. The important commentaries are:

SankarAcArya - *brahmasUtra bhAshya*  
padmapAda - *pancapAdika*  
prakASAtman - ***vivaraNa***  
akhaNDAnanda - *tattvadIpana*  
citsukha - *tAtparyadIpika*  
AnandapUrNa vidyAsAgara - *vivaraNa Tika*

sarvajnavishNu - *RjuvivaraNa*  
rangarAja dikshita - *darpaNa*  
nRsimhASrama - *bhAvaprakASikA*  
yajnanArAyaNa dikshita - *ujjIvinI*  
amalAnanda - *darpaNa*  
nRsimhASrama - *vedAntaratnakoSa*  
dharmarAja adhvarIndra - *padayojana*

The *vivaraNaprameya sangraha* of bhAratI tIrtha and vidyAraNya, the *vedAnta paribhAshA* of dharmarAja adhvarIndra and the *vivaraNopanyAsa* of rAmAnanda sarasvatI are independent works that are philosophically allied to the *vivaraNa* school of thought.

The major features which differentiate these two sub-schools are two. vAcaspati miSra's *bhAmatI* attempts to harmonize Sankara's thought with that of [maNDana miSra](#). Following this line of reasoning, later authors in the *bhAmatI* school describe the individual jIva as the locus of *avidyA*, i.e. *avidyA* is ignorance or false knowledge, but it pertains to the individual, who is subject to it. brahman is never subject to *avidyA*, but controls it in its capacity as ISvara. This school describes two functions of *avidyA* - one is its capacity to veil the Truth, and the second is its capacity to project an illusion. This school also describes *avidyA* in terms of a root *avidyA* (*mUlAvidyA*), which is universal, and is equivalent to *mAyA*, and an individual *avidyA* (*tulAvidyA*), which vanishes when *brahmajnAna* arises. Thus, this school develops its theses primarily along ontological lines. However, if the individual jIva is the locus of *avidyA*, and the individual jIva is also a product of *avidyA*, this would lead to an infinite regress, which the *bhAmatI* school avoids by positing an infinite series of beginningless jIvas and *avidyA*-s.

The *vivaraNa* school concentrates on epistemological approaches to establishing advaita. Thus, these authors hold that since there is only the One brahman, that brahman itself is both the locus of *avidyA* and the object of *avidyA*. A keen analysis of perception and inference is done, through which the non-reality of difference is established. In this approach, the later authors share company with both [padmapAda](#) and [sureSvara](#). The one problem which critics have against this school of thought is that since brahman is of the nature of pure consciousness, to describe brahman as the locus of *avidyA* would go against the omniscience of brahman. It would also attribute contradictory qualities, namely knowledge and ignorance, to the same brahman. The *vivaraNa* authors get around this problem by distinguishing between pure consciousness and valid knowledge (*pramAjnAna*). Pure consciousness is *cit*, the real essence of brahman, but valid cognition at the vyAvahArika level presumes an *avidyA*. The ultimate substratum of all cognition, and therefore also of this *avidyA*, is brahman.

It should be clear that the basic problem is still that of reconciling the upanishadic dictum of One changeless brahman with the evidence of the senses, which imply a manifold universe full of change. The *bhAmatI* and the *vivaraNa* schools are therefore only

varying approaches towards the same basic problem. There are some other authors who share both lines of thought. An early example is amalAnanda, and a later example is appayya dlkshita, whose *siddhAntaleSa-sangraha* is an encyclopedic compilation of various views. appayya points out that the differences among the authors of the bhAmatI school and the vivaraNa school are not fundamental philosophical ones, but rather a result of differing emphases and style of argumentation. Taken alone, each school has its own logical problems. However, each is a way of describing a logical/philosophical approach to the insight of Oneness that cuts through all language and logic.

Finally, there are authors who cannot be classified under either school. These typically tend to be the earlier authors in the post-Sankaran advaita tradition. Thus, we have early teachers like [jnAnaghana](#), [jnAnottama](#), [vimuktAtman](#) and slightly later ones like [sarvajnAtman](#), [SrIharsha](#) and [citsukha](#). The last two named authors strike an independent route, and demolish all non-duality through examining the premises of the nyAya logical system, while most of the others develop on the arguments first seen in sureSvara's works.



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[Transliteration Key](#)

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Numerous publications of Sankara's *upanishad bhAshyas* and *prakaraNa* treatises exist. In fact, there are so many of them that it is impossible to list them all here. Therefore, I give references only for comprehensive collections of these works. Detailed lists of references are given for the *brahmasUtra bhAshya*, *bhagavadgItA bhAshya*, *upadeSasAhasrI*, *vivekacUDAMaNi*, and *pancIkaraNa*, because these are extremely popular texts. Some publications of Sankara's yoga texts are also listed, but for the opposite reason: they are not very well-known. If you are looking for translations of specific *upanishad bhAshyas* or *prakaraNa* texts, search for publications from Chaukhamba (Varanasi, Delhi), Motilal Banarasidass (Varanasi, Delhi), Samata Books (Madras), Chetana (Bombay), Anandasrama (Pune) and Ramakrishna Math (many Indian cities), to name only a few publishers.

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● **sadAnanda yogIndra - (15th-16th cent.)**

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● **prakASAnanda sarasvatI - (16th cent.)**

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- With translation and notes by Arthur Venis, Caukhambha, Varanasi, **1975**.  
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● **nRsimhASrama - (16th cent.)**

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- *A Critique of Difference*, a free English rendering by S. S. Suryanarayana Sastri and T. M. P. Mahadevan, University of Madras, **1936** and **1965**. LC Call No.: B132.A3 S93

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● **madhusUdana sarasvatI - (16th-17th cent.)**

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  1. Shad-darsana Prakasana Pratishthana, Varanasi, **1977**. LC Call No.: B132.A3 V9 1977
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- Published with Hindi translation by Pandit Sriharihara Kripalu Dvivedi, V. Murarka, Calcutta, **1975**. LC Call No.: XM80.8013
- Translated into English by Sisir Kumar Gupta, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, **1977**. LC Call No.: BL1138.66 M3213 1977
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● **appayya dIkshita - (17th cent.)**

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5. Raghunath D. Karmarkar, *Sankara's Advaita*, Karnatak University, Dharwar, **1966**. LC Call No.: B132.A3 K3

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[Transliteration Key](#)

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- The place of karma, bhakti and jnAna in advaita vedAnta
- Perspectives -
  1. advaita vedAnta and buddhism
  2. advaita vedAnta and yoga
  3. advaita vedAnta, [Kashmir Saivism](#) and SrIvidyA





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